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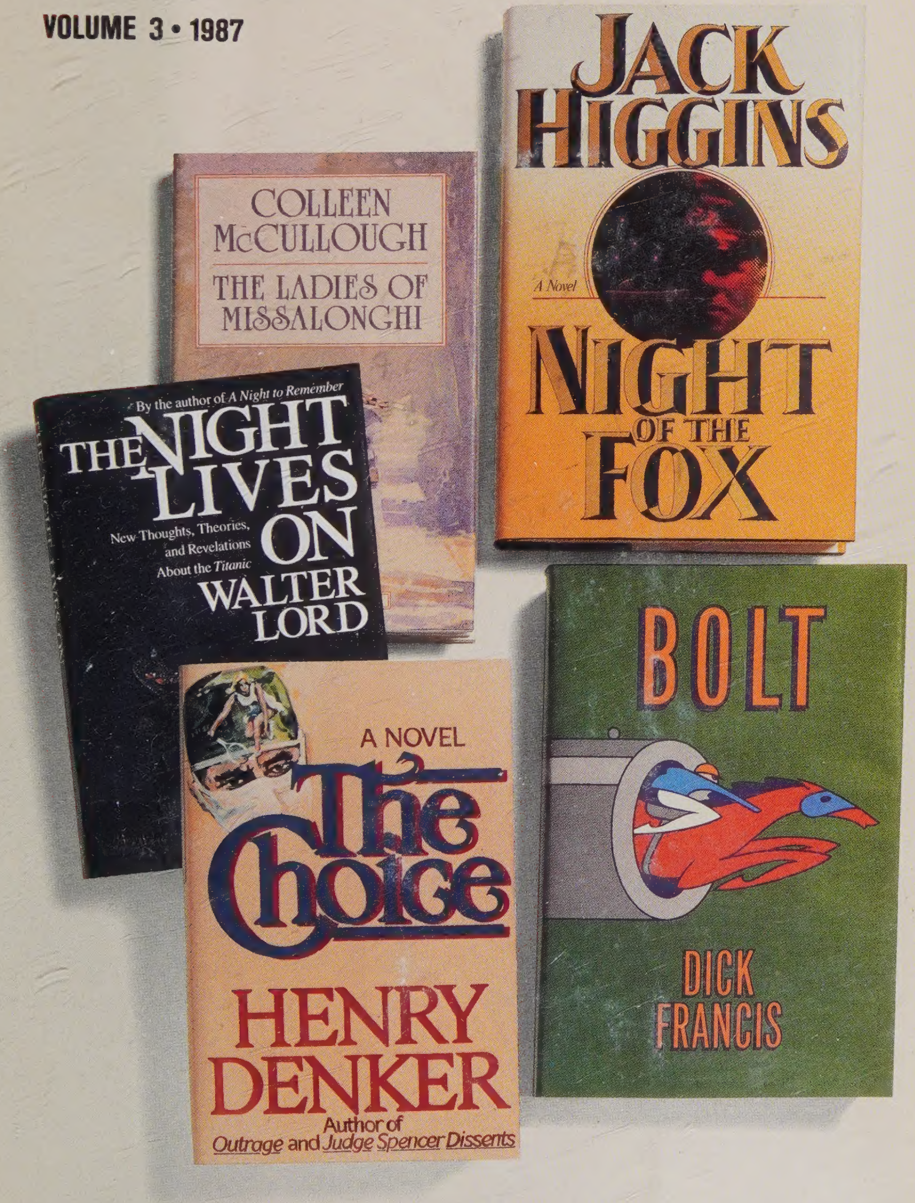
JACK HIGGINS
A Novel
NIGHT OF THE FOX
COLLEEN McCULLOUGH
THE LADIES OF MISSALONGHI
By the author of A Night to Remember
THE NIGHT LIVES ON
New Thoughts, Theories, and Revelations About the Titanic
WALTER LORD
BOLT
DICK FRANCIS
A NOVEL
The Choice
HENRY DENKER
Author of
Outrage and Judge Spencer Dissents

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Simon & Schuster, $17.95

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by Colleen McCullough
Harper & Row, $12.95

In a sleepy town in Australia, Missy Wright fears life is passing her by. Plain and penniless, she is the youngest of the three ladies of Missalonghi. And she shares with her mother, Drusilla, and her maiden aunt, Octavia, a future that holds no more promise than her past. But then one day a dynamic stranger appears out of the bush and everyone takes notice—especially Missy. Throwing caution to the winds, she chases a dream that just might come true. A magical tale by the author of *The Thorn Birds*. *Page 349*

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READER'S DIGEST CONDENSED BOOKS

Evening in Spring
by Marion Davis

READER'S DIGEST® CONDENSED BOOKS

Volume 3
1987

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Pleasantville, New York

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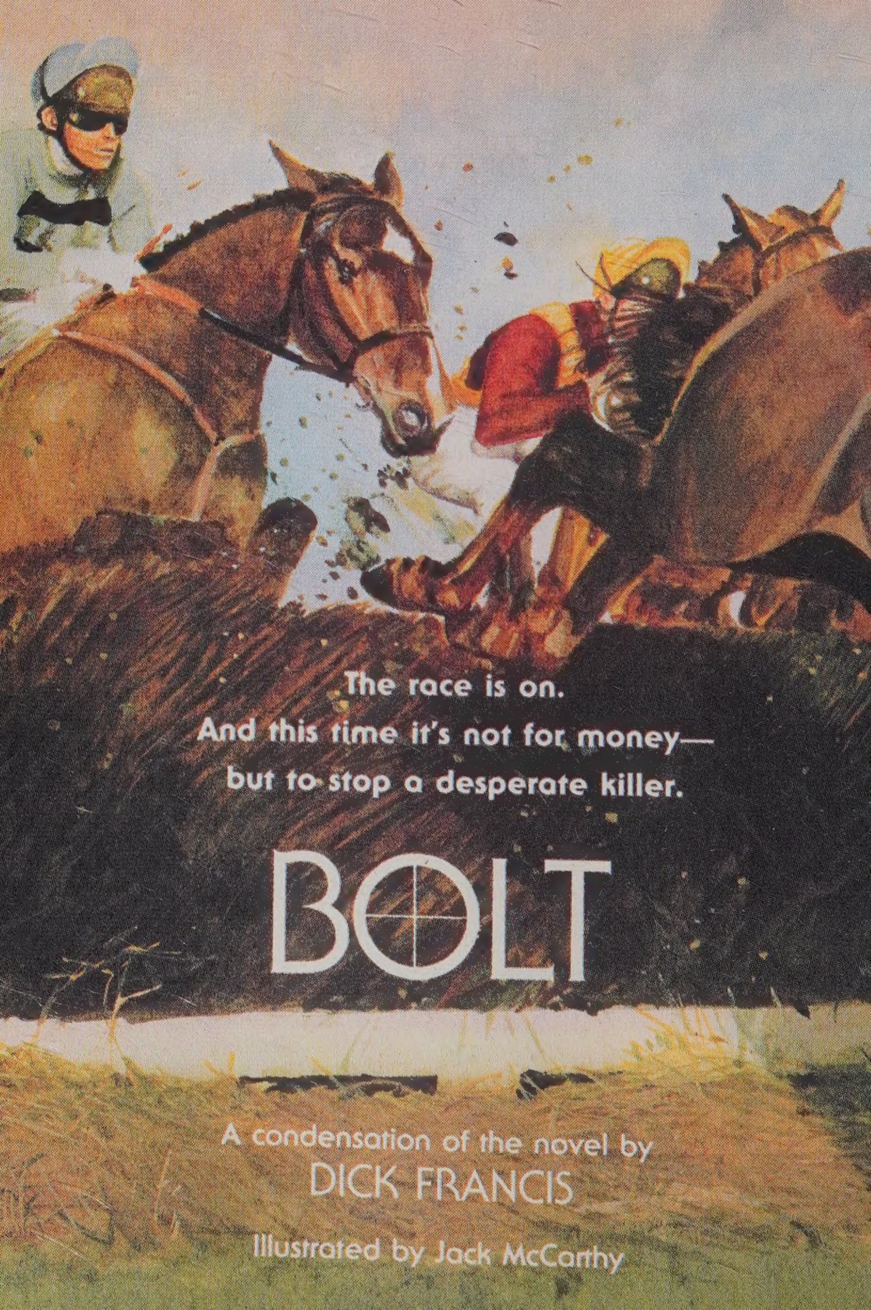

The race is on.
And this time it's not for money—
but to stop a desperate killer.

BOLT

A condensation of the novel by
DICK FRANCIS

Illustrated by Jack McCarthy

Jockey Kit Fielding is facing some high hurdles in life. His fiancée, the beautiful Danielle de Brescou, seems to be shifting her affections elsewhere. His longtime friend and employer, Princess Casilia, is being threatened by an unsavory thug. And Kit himself is the target of an old and vengeful enemy.

Then, one bleak morning, two of the princess's prize horses are found shot to death in their stalls. Who would snuff out the lives of such innocent, beautiful animals? And will the killer stop there? These are questions Kit must answer—or risk losing everything he loves.

A masterful tale of suspense from the dean of the racing world.

Chapter 1

BITTER February, within and without. Mood to match the weather; raw and overcast, near to freezing. I walked from the weighing room to the parade ring at Newbury races trying not to search for the face that wouldn't be there, the intimately known face of Danielle de Brescou, to whom I was formally engaged, diamond ring and all.

Winning the lady, back in November, had been unexpected, an awakening, deeply exciting. Keeping her was proving the merry devil. My much loved, dark-haired young woman seemed frighteningly to be switching her gaze from a steeplechase jockey (me) to an older, richer sophisticate of superior lineage (he was a prince) who hadn't even the decency to be bad-looking.

Unmoved as I tried to appear, I was finding the frustration erupting instead in the races, sending me hurtling over the fences, recklessly embracing peril like a drug to blot out rejection. It might not be sensible to do a risky job with a mind two hundred miles from one's fingertips, but tranquilizers could come in many forms.

Princess Casilia was waiting as usual in the parade ring, watching her runner Cascade walk around. I went across to her, shook the offered hand, made the small bow acknowledging her rank.

"A cold day," she said in greeting, the accent only distantly reminiscent of her European homeland.

"Yes. Cold," I said.

Danielle hadn't come, of course. Stupid of me to hope. She'd said cheerfully on the telephone that this weekend she would be going to a fabulous Florentine gathering in a hotel in the Lake District with the prince and some of his friends, to listen to lectures on the Italian Renaissance and various things of that sort. It was such an opportunity, she was sure I'd understand.

It would be the third weekend in a row she'd been sure I would understand.

The princess looked distinguished as always, middle-aged, slender, intensely feminine, warm inside a supple sable coat. Normally bareheaded, her dark, smooth hair piled high, she wore that day a tall Russian-type fur hat with a huge fur brim. I had ridden her string of twenty or so horses for almost ten years, and I tended to know her racegoing clothes well. The hat was new.

She noted my glance and the admiration but said merely, "Too cold for Cascade, do you think?"

"He won't mind it," I said.

She wouldn't mention Danielle's absence if I didn't. Always reticent, sheltering her thoughts behind long eyelashes, the princess clung to civilized manners as if to a shield against the world's worst onslaughts. She did, on the other hand, understand my present predicament perfectly well. Not only was Danielle her husband's niece, but Litsi, the prince currently diverting Danielle to a fifteenth-century junket, was her own nephew.

Litsi and Danielle were both guests under her Eaton Square roof in London, meeting from breakfast to dinner. And from dinner to breakfast, for all I really knew.

"What are our chances?" the princess asked neutrally.

"Pretty good," I said.

She nodded, full of pleasant hope. Cascade, despite an absence of brains, was a prolific winner of two-mile chases. Given luck he'd win again; but nothing's certain, ever, in racing . . . or in life.

Prince Litsi, whose whole name was about a yard long, was cosmopolitan, cultured, impressive and friendly. He spoke perfect idiomatic English—hardly surprising, as he'd been born after his royal grandparents had been chased off their throne, and had spent much of his childhood in England.

He lived now in France. I'd met him a few times over the years, when he'd visited his aunt, and I liked him in a vague way. When I'd heard he was coming again, I hadn't given a thought to the impact he might make on Danielle, a bright American female who worked for a television news agency and thirsted for Leonardo da Vinci.

"Kit," the princess said. I retrieved my attention from the Lake District and focused on her face. "Do your best."

Our prerace meetings over the years had developed into comfortable interludes in which little was said but much understood. Most owners went into parade rings accompanied by their trainers, but Wykeham Harlow, trainer of the princess's horses, was growing old. He couldn't stand the incessant winter journeys. Nevertheless, he continued to send out streams of winners from his eighty-strong stable, and I, most thankfully, rode them.

The princess went indomitably to the races in all weathers, delighting in the prowess of her surrogate children. Over many years she and I had arrived at a relationship that was both formal and deep, sharing intensities of success and moments of grief at race meetings, parting to unconnected lives at the gate.

Unconnected, that is to say, until the previous November, when Danielle had arrived from America to take up her London job and ended up in my bed. Since then, although the princess had undoubtedly accepted me as a future member of her family, her manner to me had remained virtually unchanged, especially on racecourses. The pattern had been too long set, and felt right, it seemed, to us both.

"Good luck," she said lightly when the time came for mounting. Cascade and I went down to the start, with him as usual sending no messages about his feelings. With some horses a two-way mental traffic could be almost as explicit as speech, but dark, thin, nippy Cascade was habitually and unhelpfully silent.

The race turned out to be much harder than expected, as one of the other runners jumped stride for stride with Cascade down the far side and clung like glue around the bend into the straight, his jockey keeping him aggressively close. I was in no mood to be overcrowded by him or by anybody. I kicked Cascade hard into the final jumps and drove him unmercifully along the run-in, and if he hated it, at least he wasn't telling me. He stretched out his neck and his dark head toward the winning post, and under relentless pressure persevered to the end.

We won by a matter of inches. I felt faintly ashamed of myself as Cascade, absolutely exhausted, walked with trembling legs into the winner's place to applause he certainly deserved. The princess came to greet him with slightly anxious eyes. "Weren't you too hard on him, Kit?" she asked doubtfully.

I patted Cascade's steaming neck. "He's brave," I said. "He gives all he's got."

She watched me unbuckle the girths and slide my saddle off while Dusty, the traveling head lad, covered the brown, dripping body with a sweat sheet to keep Cascade warm. "You have nothing to prove, Kit," she said clearly. "Not to me. Not to anyone."

I looked at her in surprise. She almost never said anything so personal. "Thank you," I said.

She nodded and patted my arm, a small, familiar gesture that always managed to convey both understanding and dismissal. I turned to go into the weighing room and saw one of the stewards hurrying purposefully toward Cascade, peering at him intently. Stewards always looked like that when inspecting hard-driven horses for ill-treatment, but in this particular steward's case there was far more to his zeal than a simple love of animals.

I paused in dismay. The princess turned to follow my gaze. "Go on," she said. "Weigh in."

I went on gratefully and left her to face the man who wanted, possibly more than anything else on earth, to see me lose my jockey's license.

Or better still, my life.

MAYNARD Allardeck, acting as a steward for the Newbury meeting, had both bad and good reasons to detest me, Kit Fielding.

The bad reasons were inherited and irrational. They stemmed from a feud between families that had endured for more than three centuries. In the past, Fieldings had murdered Allardecks, and Allardecks, Fieldings. I had myself, along with my twin sister, Holly, been taught from birth by our grandfather that all Allardecks were dishonest, cowardly, spiteful and treacherous, and so we would probably have gone on believing all our lives had Holly not fallen in love with and married an Allardeck.

Bobby Allardeck, her husband, was a pleasant, well-meaning fellow training horses in Newmarket. He and I, through his marriage, had finally laid the ancient feud to rest, at least in our own generation. But Bobby's father, Maynard Allardeck, was still locked in the past.

Maynard had never forgiven Bobby for what he saw as treason, and far from trying for reconciliation had intensified his belief that all Fieldings, Holly and I above all, were thieving, conniving, perfidious and cruel. He was a member of the Jockey Club, racing's ruling body, where he was busy climbing with his monumental public charm into every power position he could reach. He was aiming for the triumvirate, the three stewards of the club, from among whom the senior steward was triennially elected.

For a Fielding who was a jockey, the prospect of an Allardeck in a position of almost total power over him should have been devastating; and that was where Maynard's good and comprehensible reasons for detesting me began, because I had a hold over him of such strength that he couldn't destroy my career, my life or my reputation without doing the same to his own. He and I and a few others knew of it, just enough people to ensure that in all matters of racing he had to be seen to treat me fairly.

If, however, he could prove I had truly ill-treated Cascade, he would get me a fine and a suspension with alacrity and joy.

I went into the weighing room and sat on the scales, and then returned to just inside the door, to see what was going on outside. From the shadows I watched Maynard talking to the princess, who was wearing her blandest expression. Both of them circled the quivering Cascade, who was steaming all over in the freezing air, as Maynard had commanded Dusty to remove the sweat sheet.

Maynard, as always, looked uncreased and trustworthy, an image that served him well both in business deals, where he had made fortunes at others' expense, and in social circles, where he gave generously to charity and patted himself on the back for good works.

He had removed his hat in deference to the princess and held it clasped to his chest, his graying fair hair brushed tidily. He was almost squirming with the desire to ingratiate himself with her while at the same time denigrating her jockey.

Well, they would find no weals on Cascade, because I'd barely touched him with the whip. It was legs, feet, wrists and fury that had done the job. There might be whip marks on Cascade's soul, if he had one, but they wouldn't show on his hide.

Maynard deliberated for a lengthy time, with pursed lips, shakes of the head, and busy eyes, but in the end he bowed stiffly to the sweetly smiling princess, replaced his hat, and stalked disappointedly away.

Greatly relieved, I watched the princess join a bunch of her friends while Dusty with visible disapproval replaced the sweat sheet. I peeled off her racing colors and, with the help of my valet, changed into others for the next race. The princess knew how things stood between Maynard and me because Bobby had told her one day back in November, and although she had never referred to it since, she had clearly not forgotten. I would have to do more than half kill her horse, it seemed, before she would deliver me to my enemy.

I rode the next race acutely conscious of Allardeck in the stands—two scampering miles over hurdles, finishing fourth. After that I changed back into the princess's colors and returned to the parade ring for the day's main event, a three-mile steeplechase regarded as a trial race for the Grand National.

The princess wasn't already in the ring waiting, as she usually was, and I stood alone for a while watching her sturdy Cotopaxi being led around by his lad. Like many of her horses, Cotopaxi bore the name of a mountain, and in his case it fitted aptly, as he was big, gaunt and craggy, a liver chestnut with splashes of gray on his quarters. At eight years old he was coming satisfactorily to full strength, and for once I believed I might at last win the big one in a month's time.

I'd won almost every race in the calendar except the Grand National. Cotopaxi had it in him to change that, given the luck.

Dusty came across to disrupt the pleasant daydream. "Where's the princess?" he said.

"I don't know."

"She'd never miss old Paxi." Small, elderly, weather-beaten and habitually suspicious, Dusty looked at me accusingly, as if I'd heard something I wasn't telling.

Dusty depended on me professionally, as I on him, but we'd never come to liking. He was apt to remind me that, champion jockey or not, I wouldn't get so many winners if it weren't for the hard work of the stable lads. His manner to me teetered on the edge of rudeness, and I put up with it equably because he was in fact good at his job, and besides, I hadn't much choice. Since Wykeham had stopped coming to the races, the horses' welfare away from home depended entirely upon Dusty.

"Cascade," Dusty said, glowering, "can hardly put one foot in front of the other."

"He's not lame," I said mildly.

I looked around for the princess. It was extraordinary that she wasn't in the parade ring. She had been talking all winter about Cotopaxi's chances in the National.

The minutes ticked away, the signal was given for jockeys to mount, and Dusty gave me his usual adroit leg up into the saddle. I rode out onto the course and had time, cantering down to the start, to look up to the princess's private box, high in the stands, expecting to see her there, at least, watching with her friends.

The balcony was deserted, and I felt the first twinge of real concern. I hoped there hadn't been sudden bad news about the frail, chair-bound husband she traveled home to every evening.

Cotopaxi, unlike Cascade, was positively bombarding me with information, mostly to the effect that he was feeling good, he didn't mind the cold weather, and he was glad to be back on a racecourse for the first time since Christmas. January had been snowy and the first part of February freezing, and keen racers like Cotopaxi got easily bored by long spells in the stables.

We went around the course circumspectly, setting ourselves right at every fence and jumping them all cleanly. I did enough stick waving to give an impression of riding a flat-out finish, and we finished in undisgraced third place, close enough to the winner to be encouraging. A good workout for Cotopaxi and a tremor of promise for the princess.

She didn't appear in the unsaddling enclosure, and I asked around in the weighing room for any message from her, with no results. I changed again to ride in the fifth race, and after that, in street clothes, decided to go up to her box.

The princess rented a private box at several racecourses and had them all decorated alike with colors of cream, coffee and peach. In each was a dining table with chairs, and beyond, glass doors to the viewing balcony. She entertained groups of friends regularly, but on that day even the friends had vanished.

I knocked briefly on the door and, without waiting for an answer, walked in.

The table was set with the paraphernalia of tea: small sandwiches, small cakes, cups and saucers. All was untouched, and there was no waitress offering tea with lemon and a smile.

But the box wasn't empty.

The princess was there, sitting down. Near her, silent, stood a man I didn't know. Not much more than my own age, slender, dark-haired, with a strong nose and jaw.

"Princess," I said, taking a step into the room.

She turned her head. She was still wearing the sable coat and the Russian hat. Her eyes looked at me without expression, glazed and vacant. Shock, I thought.

"Princess," I said again.

The man spoke. His voice matched his nose and jaw, positive, full of strength.

"Go away," he said.

I WENT. I certainly didn't want to intrude into any private troubles in the princess's life. I had been too long accustomed to our arm's-length relationship to think her affairs any of my business, except to the extent that she was Danielle's aunt.

But by the time I was walking out to my car, I wished I hadn't left without at least asking if I could help. There had been a warning quality in the stranger's voice that had seemed at first to be protective of the princess, but in retrospect I wasn't so sure. Nothing would be lost, I thought, if I waited for her to come down from her box to return home and made sure she was all right.

I went through the paddock gate to the parking lot, where her chauffeur, Thomas, was waiting for her in her Rolls-Royce. Large and dependable, Thomas had been driving the princess for years.

He saw me coming and gave a wave. "Is she ready?" he asked.

I shook my head. "There's a man with her." I paused. "Do you know a fairly young man, dark-haired, thin, prominent nose?"

He pondered and said no one sprang to mind, and why was it worrying me?

"She didn't watch one of her horses race."

Thomas sat up straighter. "She'd never not watch. That's bad."

"Yes, I'd think so."

I told Thomas I would go back to make sure she was okay. The last race was over, the crowds leaving fast. I stood near the gate, where I couldn't miss the princess when she came, and scanned faces. Many I knew; many knew me. I said good night fifty times and watched in vain for the fur hat. The crowd died to a trickle and the trickle to twos and threes. I had just begun to wander slowly back toward the stands when she came out. She was alone, and in no state to be.

"Princess," I called, going fast to her side. "Let me help."

She looked at me unseeingly, swaying. I put an arm firmly around her waist and felt her stiffen, as if to deny her need for support. "I'm perfectly all right," she said shakily.

"Yes . . . well, hold my arm." I offered her my arm, which after hesitation she accepted. We walked slowly to the car, where Thomas stood waiting, opening a rear door at our approach.

"Thank you," the princess said faintly, climbing in. "Thank you, Kit." She sank into the seat and put one hand to her head. "Do we have any water, Thomas?"

"Yes, madam," he said with alacrity, and went to the trunk to fetch the small refreshment box he habitually took along. Sloe gin, champagne and mineral water were always on hand.

Thomas gave her some mineral water in a cut-glass tumbler with ice tinkling. She took two or three sips and sat staring vaguely into space.

"Princess," I said diffidently, "would it perhaps be of any use if I traveled with you to London?"

A sort of shudder shook her. "Yes," she said with clear relief. "I need someone to . . ." She stopped, not finding the words.

Someone to prevent her breaking down, I guessed. We made a brief stop on our way out of the racecourse for me to move my

Mercedes to a safe spot and tell the stable manager I'd be back for it later. The princess seemed not to notice these arrangements, and it wasn't until we were well on the way to London that she finally stirred, absentmindedly handing me the glass with the ice melted.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "to have given you trouble."

"But you haven't."

"I have had," she went on carefully, "a bad shock. And I cannot explain . . ." She shook her head.

"Is there anything I can do?" I said.

"I'm not sure how much I can ask."

"A great deal," I said bluntly.

The first signs of a smile crept back into her eyes, but faded again rapidly. "I've been thinking . . ." she said. "When we reach London, will you come in and wait while I talk to my husband?"

"Yes, of course."

"You can spare the time? Perhaps . . . a few hours?"

"Any amount," I assured her wryly. Danielle had gone to Leonardo, and time was a drag without her. We traveled another long way in silence, with the princess staring into space and sighing.

"Thomas," she said at length, "please will you see if Mrs. Jenkins is still in the house? If she is, would you ask her to see if Mr. Gerald Greening would be free to come round this evening?"

"Yes, madam," Thomas said, and pressed buttons on the car's telephone, glancing down while he drove.

Mrs. Jenkins worked for the princess and Monsieur de Brescou as secretary and all-around personal assistant. She worked only weekdays and left promptly at five o'clock. Thomas caught her, apparently, on the doorstep, and passed on the message.

By the time we reached Eaton Square, the princess had recovered to a great extent. We went inside the house, leaving Thomas to drive away, and together walked up the wide staircase. The ground floor consisted of an office, a guest suite, a library and a morning room. The princess and her husband lived chiefly upstairs, with drawing room, sitting room and dining room on the first floor and bedrooms on the floors above. Staff lived in the basement, and there was an efficient elevator from top to bottom, installed to accommodate Monsieur de Brescou's wheelchair.

"Will you wait in the sitting room?" she said. "If you'd like tea, ring down to Dawson. I'm afraid I may be a long time."

"I'll be here."

She nodded and went up the broad flight of stairs to the floor above, where she and her husband each had a private suite. I had never been up there, but Danielle had described his rooms as a minihospital, with besides his bedroom and sitting room, a physiotherapy room and a room for a male nurse.

"What's wrong with him?" I'd asked her.

"Some frightful virus. I don't know exactly what, but not polio. His legs just stopped working, years ago. They don't say much about it, and you know, it feels intrusive to ask."

I went into the sitting room and phoned on the house's intercom system down to Dawson, the rather august butler, for tea.

"Certainly, sir," he said. "Is Princess Casilia with you?"

"She's upstairs with Monsieur de Brescou."

He said, "Ah," and the line clicked off. He appeared in a short time, bearing a small silver tray with tea and lemon but no milk, no sugar and no biscuits.

"Did we have a successful afternoon, sir?" he asked.

"A win and a third."

He gave me a small smile. "Very gratifying, sir."

"Yes."

He nodded, set down his burden, and went away. I drank the tea and tried not to think of buttered toast. During the February freeze I had somehow gained three pounds and was in consequence having a worse than usual battle against weight.

The sitting room was comfortable, with flowered fabrics, rugs and pools of warm lamplight. I switched on the television to watch the news, switched it off after, and glanced through some magazines. Time passed. Eventually, shortly after eight, Dawson reappeared and invited me upstairs to Monsieur de Brescou's suite. I walked into his sitting room, with its gold swagged curtains, dark green walls and dark red leather armchairs.

Roland de Brescou sat as usual in his wheelchair, and it was clear at once that he was suffering from the same severe shock as the princess. His pale skin was stretched over his cheekbones, and his eyes were gaunt and staring. He had been, I supposed, a good-looking man long ago, and he retained a noble head of white hair and a naturally aristocratic manner. He wore, as ever, a dark suit and tie, making no concessions to illness. Since my engagement to Danielle I had met him a few times, but although unfailingly courteous he was as reticent as the princess herself.

"Come in," he said. "Good evening, Kit."

"Good evening, monsieur," I said, making a small bow.

The princess, sitting in one of the armchairs, said apologetically, "We've kept you waiting so long. . . . We want you to meet Mr. Greening."

Mr. Greening, standing against a green wall in dinner jacket and black tie, was bald and round-bellied and somewhere on the far side of fifty. He was regarding me with knowing eyes, assessing my age (thirty-one), height (five feet ten), clothes (gray suit, unremarkable) and possibly my income.

"The jockey," he said in a voice that had been to Eton. "Strong and brave."

He was ironic, which I didn't mind. I smiled faintly, went through the obvious categories, and came up with a possibility. "The lawyer," I suggested. "Astute."

He laughed and peeled himself off the paintwork. "Gerald Greening," he said, nodding. "Solicitor. Would you be kind enough to witness some signatures to documents?" He picked up a clipboard lying on a coffee table, turned a sheet of paper back over the clip, and offered a pen to Roland de Brescou.

With a shaky flourish the old man wrote his name on the second page.

"Now you, Mr. Fielding." I signed where he asked.

The two-page document, I noticed, was handwritten in neat black script. Roland de Brescou's name and mine were both in the same black ink. Gerald Greening's address and occupation, when he added them at the bottom after his own signature, matched the handwriting of the text.

A rush job, I thought. Tomorrow could be too late.

"There isn't any necessity for you to know what's in the document you signed," Greening said to me, "but Princess Casilia insists I tell you. Please sit down. It'll take some time."

I sat in a leather armchair. I was undeniably curious.

"Put simply," Greening said, "the document states that notwithstanding any former arrangements to the contrary, Monsieur de Brescou may not make any business decisions without the knowledge, assent and properly witnessed signatures of Princess Casilia, Prince Litsi and Miss Danielle de Brescou."

I listened in puzzlement. If there was nothing wrong with Roland de Brescou's competence, why the haste to sign away his authority?

"This is an interim measure," Gerald Greening went on. "A sandbag affair, one might say, to keep back the waters while we build the seawall." He took a turn around the room, hands, complete with clipboard, clasped behind his back.

"You must understand," he went on, "that Monsieur de Brescou's is a patrician family, even though he himself bears no title. For him, personal and family honor is of supreme importance. In the mid-nineteenth century his great-grandfather was offered an opportunity to contribute to the building of bridges and canals, and in consequence he founded one of France's great construction companies. The business prospered hugely, and at the beginning of this century Monsieur de Brescou's grandfather agreed to merge the family business with another construction company, whose chief interest was roads, not canals. Monsieur de Brescou's grandfather retained fifty percent of the new company, an arrangement that gave neither partner outright control."

Gerald Greening paced slowly around behind the chairs.

"Monsieur de Brescou's father was killed in the Second World War without inheriting the business. Monsieur de Brescou himself inherited it when his grandfather died, age ninety, after the war. Are you with me so far?"

"Yes," I said.

"Good." He went on pacing. "The firm which had merged with that of Monsieur de Brescou's grandfather was headed by a man called Henri Nanterre, also of aristocratic descent. The two men liked and trusted each other and agreed that their joint business should adhere to the highest principles. They installed managers of good reputation and sat back and . . . er, increased their fortunes. During the Second World War the firm had gone into recession, but it revived in the 1950s, despite the deaths of the original managing friends. Monsieur de Brescou remained on good terms with the inheriting Nanterre, Louis, and the tradition of employing top managers went on. And that brings us to three years ago, when Louis Nanterre died and left his fifty percent share to his only son, also named Henri. Henri Nanterre is thirty-seven, an able entrepreneur. But he is of the modern world. That is to say, the old values mean little to him."

"He has no honor," Roland de Brescou said with distaste. "He disgraces his name."

I said slowly to the princess, "What does he look like?"

"You saw him," she said simply. "In my box."

Chapter 2

THERE was a brief silence; then the princess said to Greening, "Go on, Gerald. Tell Kit what that . . . that wretched man wants."

Before Greening could speak, Roland de Brescou turned his wheelchair to face me and said, "I will tell you. I didn't think you should be involved in our affairs, but my wife wishes it." He gestured faintly with a thin hand, acknowledging his affection for her. "And as you are to marry Danielle, well, then, perhaps . . ."

"As you know," he went on, "I have been for a long time . . ." He gestured down his body, not spelling it out. "We have lived also a long time in London. Far away from the business, you understand?"

I nodded.

"Louis Nanterre, he used to go there quite often to consult the managers. We would talk often on the telephone. We would decide together if it looked sensible to go in new directions. He and I, for instance, developed a factory to make things out of plastic, not metal, nor concrete. Things like heavy drainpipes that would not crack under roads, nor corrode. You understand? We developed new plastics, very tough."

He paused, it seemed, through lack of breath. "Louis," he said eventually, "used to come to London twice a year, with auditors and lawyers—Gerald would be here—and we would discuss what had been done and make plans." He sighed heavily. "Then Louis died, and I asked Henri to come over for the meetings, and he refused. Then suddenly I no longer knew what was happening, and I sent Gerald over and wrote to the auditors. . . ."

"Henri had sacked the auditors," Gerald Greening said, "and engaged others of his own choice. He had sacked half the managers and was taking charge directly himself, and had branched out into directions that Monsieur de Brescou knew nothing about."

"It's intolerable," Roland de Brescou said.

"And today?" I asked tentatively. "What did he say at Newbury?"

"To go to my wife!" He was quivering with fury. "To threaten her. It's disgraceful."

"Nanterre told Princess Casilia," Gerald Greening said, "that he needed her husband's signature on a document, that her husband did not want to sign, and that she was to make sure he did."

"What document?" I asked flatly.

Greening shrugged. "A French government form for a preliminary application for a license to manufacture and export guns."

"Guns?" I said, surprised. "What sort of guns?"

"Firearms for killing people. Small arms made of plastic."

"He told me," the princess said, "that it would be simple to use the strong plastics for guns. Many modern pistols can be made of plastic. It is cheaper and lighter, he said, the forerunner of a whole new concept of handguns. And he knew he would definitely be granted a license. The de Brescou et Nanterre company is so reputable and respected that all he needed was my husband's agreement, the de Brescou cachet."

"Guns!" said Roland de Brescou. "I will never sign. It is dishonorable, do you understand, to trade nowadays in weapons of war. It is unthinkable. Especially guns made of plastic, which were invented so they could be carried through airports without being found. The plastic is undetectable by X-ray scanners. These guns will be carried into government buildings by terrorists. Never, never shall it happen that my name is used to sell guns that may find their way to terrorists. It is inconceivable."

I saw indeed that it was.

"One of our older managers telephoned me a month ago to ask if I truly meant to make guns," he said, outraged. "I had heard nothing of it. Nothing. Then Henri Nanterre sent a lawyer's letter, formally asking my assent. I replied that I would never give it. And now—to threaten my wife!"

"What sort of threats?" I asked.

"Nanterre told me," the princess said, "that he was sure I would persuade my husband to sign, because I wouldn't want any accidents to happen to anyone I liked . . . or employed."

No wonder she had been devastated, I thought. Guns, threats of violence, a vista of dishonor.

"What happened to your friends at Newbury?" I asked her. "The ones in your box."

"He told them to go," she said tiredly. "He said he needed to talk urgently, and they were not to come back."

"And they went."

"Yes."

Well . . . I'd gone myself.

"I didn't know who he was," the princess said. "He came bursting in and drowned my questions and protestations. When I tried to stand up, he pushed me down. When I talked, he talked louder. He went on and on, saying the same things over again. When you came into the box, I was completely dazed."

"I should have stayed."

"No . . . much better that you didn't."

Gerald Greening cleared his throat, put the clipboard face down on a side table, and stood rocking on his heels. "Princess Casilia tells me," he said, jingling coins in his pockets, "that last November her jockey got the better of two villainous press barons, one villainous asset stripper and various villainous thugs."

I turned my head and briefly met his glance, which was brightly empty of belief. A jokey man, I thought. Not what I would have chosen in a lawyer.

"Things sort of fell into place," I said neutrally.

"And are they all still after your blood?"

"Only the asset stripper, as far as I know," I said.

"Maynard Allardeck? I've met him. A sound and charming man, I would have said. Not a villain at all."

I made no comment.

"Anyway," Greening said, still rocking on his heels, "Princess Casilia would now like you to gallop to the rescue and try to rid Monsieur de Brescou of the obnoxious Nanterre."

"No, no," the princess protested. "I said no such thing."

I stood up slowly and turned to face Greening directly, and I don't know exactly what he saw, but he stopped rocking and took his hands out of his pockets and said with an abrupt change of tone, "That's not what she said, but that's undoubtedly what she wants." He looked at me uneasily. "Look, my dear chap, perhaps I got things wrong."

"Kit," the princess said behind me, "please sit down. I most certainly didn't ask that. I wondered only . . . Oh, do sit down."

I sat, and looked at her troubled eyes. "I'll do anything I can to help," I said with acceptance. "But I'm still . . . a jockey."

"You're a Fielding," she said unexpectedly. "You—" She broke off in some confusion, then, with a visible return to composure, went on. "I wanted to ask you to do what you could to prevent any 'accidents.' To think of what might happen, to warn us, advise us. We need someone like you, who can imagine . . ."

She stopped. I knew exactly what she meant. There was no possible way, I reflected, to guard perpetually against assassination, but I doubted if Henri Nanterre meant to go that far, if only because he wouldn't necessarily gain from it. More likely he thought he could put the frighteners quite easily on a paralyzed old man and an unworldly woman and was currently underestimating both the princess's courage and her husband's inflexible honor. He would be expecting the threats to be enough. How soon, I wondered, would he find out they weren't?

I said to the princess, "Did Nanterre give you any time scale? When and where he expected Monsieur to sign the form?"

"He said," the princess answered weakly, "that a notary would have to witness the signature. He said he would arrange it."

"A notary? A French lawyer?"

"I don't know."

"What do you suppose Nanterre will do," I asked Greening, "when he discovers four people have to sign the application form now, not just Monsieur?"

He stared at me. "Consequences," he said, "are your particular field, as I understand it."

"There's a simple way," I said to Monsieur de Brescou, "to keep all your family safe and to preserve your good name. Change the name of the company and sell your share."

He blinked. "Unfortunately," he said, "I cannot do either without Henri Nanterre's agreement. The original partnership was set up in that way." He paused. "It is of course possible that he would agree to such changes if he could set up a consortium to acquire the whole, with himself to be at its head with a majority vote. He could then, if he wished, manufacture guns. Tell me," he added, "would you personally follow that course?"

Would I? I thought. Would I, if I were old and paralyzed? Would I if I knew the result would be a load of new guns in a world already awash with them? If I knew I was backing away from my principles? If I cared for my family's safety?

"I don't know, monsieur," I said.

He smiled faintly and turned toward the princess. "And you, my dear? Would you?"

Whatever answer she would have given was interrupted by the buzz of the intercom. The princess picked up the handset, pressed a button, and said, "Yes? . . . Just a minute." She looked at her husband. "Are you expecting visitors? Dawson says two men have called, saying they have an appointment."

Roland de Brescou was shaking his head when there was a squawk from the handset.

"What?" asked the princess. "What did you say, Dawson?" She listened but seemed to hear nothing. "He's gone," she said, puzzled. "What do you suppose happened?"

"I'll go and see," I said. I rose and went as far as the door, but before I could touch it, it opened abruptly to reveal two men. One unmistakably was Henri Nanterre; the other, a pace behind, a pale young man in a black suit, carrying a briefcase.

Dawson, out of breath, appeared with a rush behind them. "Madam," he was saying helplessly, "they simply ran past me."

Henri Nanterre rudely shut the door on Dawson's explanations and turned to face us. He seemed disconcerted to find Gerald Greening there, and he took a sharp look at me. I guessed he had expected only the princess and her husband, reckoning he had softened them both up enough for his purpose.

He clicked his fingers to his companion, who removed a sheet of paper from the briefcase and handed it to him. Then, waving the paper, he said in a loud voice in French something long and clearly objectionable to Roland de Brescou, drowning his attempts to interrupt him.

"Nanterre!" Gerald Greening said peremptorily, and got no pause in the tirade. I went back to my armchair and sat down, crossing my legs and swinging my foot. The motion irritated Nanterre into breaking off and saying something to me that might have been *"Et qui êtes-vous?"* though I couldn't be sure. My sketchy French had been learned mostly on racecourses. I stared mildly at Nanterre and went on swinging my foot.

Greening took the opportunity to say rather pompously, "Monsieur de Brescou has no power to sign any paper whatsoever."

"Don't be ridiculous," Nanterre said, speaking English. "He has too much power. He is out of touch with the modern world. I require him to make a decision that will bring new impetus and prosperity to a company that is aging and suffering from out-of-date methods. The period of road building is over. We must look to new markets."

"Monsieur de Brescou has relinquished his power to make solo decisions," Greening said. "Four people besides yourself must now put their names to any change of company policy."

"That is untrue. De Brescou has total command."

"No longer. He has signed it away."

Nanterre looked flummoxed, and I began to think that Greening's sandbags might actually hold against the flood when he made the stupid error of glancing smugly in the direction of the downturned clipboard. Nanterre followed his eyes and moved like lightning to the side table.

"Put that down!" Greening said furiously, but Nanterre was skimming the pages and handing them briskly to his pale acolyte.

"Is that legal?" Nanterre demanded.

Gerald Greening was advancing to retrieve his property. The unintroduced Frenchman backed away while he read. *"Oui,"* he said finally. "Yes. Legal."

"In that case"—Nanterre snatched the clipboard, tore the handwritten pages off it, and ripped them across—"the document no longer exists."

"Of course it exists," I said. "Even in pieces, it exists. Its intention remains a fact, and it can be written again."

Nanterre's gaze sharpened in my direction. "Who are you?"

"A friend."

"Stop swinging that foot."

I went on swinging it. "Why don't you just face the fact that Monsieur de Brescou will never let his company sell arms?" I said. "Why, if that's what you want to do, don't you dissolve the existing company and set up again on your own?"

His answer, when it came, was grudging but clearly the truth. Bad news for Roland de Brescou. "I was told that only if de Brescou applied personally would I be granted the facility. I was told it was essential to have the backing of his name."

It struck me that perhaps someone in France didn't want Nanterre to make guns and was taking subtle steps to prevent it while avoiding making a flat and perhaps embarrassing refusal.

"Therefore," Nanterre went on ominously, "de Brescou will sign. With or without trouble." He held out the torn pages to his assistant. "Find a bathroom," he said. "Get rid of these pieces."

The pale young man nodded and went away. Gerald Greening made several protestations that had no effect on Nanterre, who was looking as though various thoughts were occurring to him that gave him no pleasure. He interrupted Greening, saying loudly, "Where are the people whose names were on the agreement?"

Greening, showing the first piece of lawyerly sense in a long time, said he had no idea.

Nanterre went to the door and shouted loudly down the hallway. "Valery! Come here at once."

The man Valery hurried back empty-handed. "The agreement is finished," he said reassuringly. "Down the drain."

"You read the names on it, didn't you?" Nanterre demanded. "You remember those names?"

Valery swallowed. "I didn't, er . . ." he stammered. "I didn't study the names. Er, the first one was Princess Casilia. . . ."

"And the others?"

Valery shook his head, eyes wide. He as well as Nanterre saw too late that they'd thrown away knowledge they might have used.

Nanterre transmitted his frustration into an increase of aggression, thrusting the application form again toward Roland de Brescou and demanding he sign it.

Monsieur de Brescou didn't even shake his head. Nanterre was losing, I thought, and would soon retire. I was wrong.

He handed the form to Valery, put his right hand inside his jacket, and from a hidden holster he produced a black and businesslike pistol. With a gliding step he reached the princess and pressed the barrel against her temple.

"Now," he said gratingly to de Brescou, "sign the form."

INTO an electrified atmosphere I said plainly, "Don't be ridiculous."

"Stop swinging that foot." Nanterre was furious.

I stopped swinging it. There was a time for everything.

"If you shoot Princess Casilia," I said, my mouth drier than I liked, "we are all witnesses. You would have to kill us all, including Valery."

Valery moaned. Gerald Greening, somewhere behind me, was saying, "Oh, my God."

"Monsieur de Brescou would not have signed the form," I said. "You would end up in jail for life. What would be the point?"

Nanterre stared at me with hot dark eyes. After a pause that lasted a couple of millennia, he stepped away from the princess and shoved the gun back into his jacket.

"There are no bullets," he said. He gave me a bitter glance, as if to impress my face on his memory forever, and without another word walked out of the room. Valery scuttled away in his wake.

The princess, with a small sound of distress, slid onto her knees and put her arms around her husband, her face turned to his neck, her shining dark hair against his cheek. He raised a thin hand to stroke her head and looked at me with somber eyes.

"I would have signed," he said.

"Yes, monsieur."

I felt sick myself and could hardly imagine their turmoil. The princess was shaking visibly, crying, I thought.

I stood up. "I'll wait downstairs," I said.

Monsieur de Brescou gave the briefest of nods. Numbly Gerald Greening came after me, closing the door, and we went down to the sitting room where I'd waited earlier.

"Did you know," he said croakily, "that the gun was empty?"

"No."

"You took a terrible risk." He made straight for a tray of bottles and glasses, pouring brandy with a shaking hand. "Do you want some?" I nodded and sat rather weakly on one of the chintz sofas. He gave me a glass and collapsed in much the same fashion.

"I've never liked guns," he said hollowly.

"I wonder if he meant to produce it," I said. "He didn't mean to use it or he'd have brought it loaded."

"Then why carry it at all?"

"A prototype, wouldn't you say?" I suggested. "His plastic demonstration model."

Greening made inroads into his brandy and said, "These threats, tonight's behavior . . . Do you think he'll give up?"

"Nanterre? No. He'll try again. Another way, perhaps."

"When you aren't there." He looked at his watch. "I'm supposed to be meeting my wife at a dinner." He paused. "If I go in a short while, will you make my apologies?"

"Okay. But aren't you going . . . er . . . to reinstate the sandbags? It might safeguard Monsieur de Brescou as you intended, especially as Nanterre doesn't know who else to put pressure on. Did Danielle and Prince Litsi know their names had been used?"

He shook his head. "Princess Casilia couldn't remember the name of the hotel up north where they are staying this weekend. Their assent at this stage wasn't legally necessary."

I reckoned it was no longer fair to embroil them without their consent, and I was on the point of saying so when the door opened and Princess Casilia came in. We stood up. If she had been crying, there was no sign of it.

"Gerald, we both want to thank you for coming," she said, her voice higher in pitch than usual. "We are so sorry about your dinner. My husband asks if you could return tomorrow morning."

Greening asked if ten o'clock would suit, and with evident relief took his departure.

"Kit." The princess turned to me. "Will you stay here in the house tonight? In case . . . just in case."

"Yes," I said.

She smiled slightly. "It has been such a dreadful day. Ask Dawson to bring you some food. Tell him you'll sleep in the bamboo room. My husband wants to see you in the morning."

"Fairly early," I suggested. "I have to be at Newbury for the first race."

"Goodness! I'd forgotten. I didn't even ask how Cotopaxi ran."

"He was third. Ran well." It seemed a long time ago. "You'll see it on the video."

Like many owners she bought videotapes of most of her horses' races, to watch and reenjoy their performances. "Yes, that'll be nice." She said good night and went gently away upstairs.

A remarkable woman, I thought, not for the first time, and descended to the basement in search of Dawson, who made no demur at checking with me through the house's defenses. Window locks, front door, rear door, basement door, all secure.

John Grundy, the male nurse, he said, would arrive at ten, assist Monsieur to bed, sleep in the room next to his, and in the morning help him bathe, shave and dress. He would do Monsieur's laundry and be gone by eleven.

Only Dawson and his wife (the princess's personal maid) slept in the basement, he said; all the rest of the staff came in by day. Prince Litsi, who was occupying the guest suite on the ground floor, and Miss de Brescou, whose room was beyond the princess's suite, were away, as I knew.

His eyebrows shot up at the mention of the bamboo room, and when he took me by elevator to the floor above the princess and her husband, I could see why. Palatial, pale blue and cream, it looked fit for the noblest of visitors, the bamboo of its name found in the pattern of its curtains and the pale Chinese Chippendale furniture. There was a vast double bed, a dressing room, a bathroom and a good television set hidden behind discreet louvered doors.

Dawson left me there, and I made my regular evening telephone call to Wykeham Harlow, to tell him how his horses had run. He was pleased, he said, about Cotopaxi, but did I realize what I'd done to Cascade? He was so exhausted he could hardly hold his head up. "There's winning and winning," he said testily. "You've ruined him for Cheltenham."

"I'm sorry," I said contritely. Cheltenham, two and a half weeks ahead, was of course the top meeting of the jumping year, its races loaded with prestige and prizes.

"Don't do anything like that tomorrow with Calgoorlie."

I sighed. Calgoorlie had been dead for years. Wykeham's memory was apt to slip cogs. "Do you mean Kinley?" I suggested.

"What? Yes, of course. That's what I said. You give him a nice ride, now, Kit."

At least, I thought, he knew who he was talking to. On the telephone he still called me often by the name of Paul, the jockey who'd had my job ten years earlier.

I assured him I would give Kinley a nice ride. Kinley was a white-hot hope for Cheltenham, and if he didn't win comfortably at Newbury, the expectations could cool to pink.

"All right, then," he said, mollified. "Good night, Paul."

"Good night, Wykeham," I said.

Wryly I telephoned the answering machine in my own house, but there was nothing much in the way of messages, and presently Dawson returned with a supper of chicken soup, cold ham and a banana (my choice).

Later I slept on and off between linen sheets under a silk coverlet in pajamas thoughtfully supplied by Dawson, and in the morning was ushered in to see Roland de Brescou.

He was alone in his sitting room, freshly dressed in a city suit with a white shirt and foulard tie.

"Please sit down," he said civilly, and watched me take the same armchair as the evening before. "I wish to thank you for coming to our defense and for giving me time to consider what to do about Henri Nanterre." He moistened his dry lips. "I have been unable to sleep. . . . I cannot risk harm to Princess Casilia or anyone around us. It is time for me to relinquish control. But it won't be easy to find any family member to take my place."

I made a nondescript noise. His gaze steadied on my face. "Princess Casilia will go to the races today. She hopes you will go with her in her car. . . . May I ask you to defend her from harm?"

"Yes," I said matter-of-factly. "With my life."

It didn't even sound melodramatic after the past evening's events. He merely nodded a fraction, as if to seal the pact, and I stood up to take my leave. There was a briefcase, I saw, lying half under one of the chairs between me and the door, and I picked it up to ask him where he would like it put.

"It isn't mine," he said. "It must be Gerald Greening's."

I had a sudden picture, however, of the pathetic Valery producing the handgun application form from that case. When I explained to Roland de Brescou, he suggested I take the case downstairs to the hall for when its owner called to collect it.

I took it away with me but, lacking de Brescou's honesty, went up to the bamboo room. The case proved to be unlocked and unexciting, containing merely what looked like a duplicate of the form that Roland de Brescou hadn't signed.

On buff paper, mostly in small, badly printed italics, and of course in French, it hardly looked worth the upheaval it was causing. As far as I could make out, it wasn't specifically to do with armaments, but had many dotted-line spaces to be filled in. I put it in a drawer of a bedside table and took the briefcase downstairs, meeting Gerald Greening as he arrived. He said he had not only rewritten the sandbags but had had the document properly typed and provided with seals. Would I be so good as to repeat my services as witness?

We returned to Roland de Brescou and wrote our names, and I mentioned about telling Danielle and Prince Litsi.

"Yes, yes," Greening said. "I understand they return tomorrow evening. Perhaps you could inform them yourself."

"Perhaps." I left them beginning to discuss how best to find a de Brescou successor. I made various preparations for the day, and I was waiting in the hall when the princess came down to go to the races, with Dawson hovering and Thomas, alerted by telephone, drawing smoothly to a halt outside in the Rolls.

"It is important," the princess said conversationally as soon as we were settled in the car, "not to let peril deter one from one's pleasures. Now, tell me about Cotopaxi." She listened to me contentedly, and then we discussed Kinley, her brilliant young hurdler, and after that her other runner for the day, Hillsborough. It wasn't until we were nearing Newbury that I asked if she would mind if Thomas accompanied her into the meeting.

"Thomas?" she said, surprised. "But he doesn't like racing. It bores him. Doesn't it, Thomas?"

"Ordinarily, madam," he said.

"Thomas is large and capable," I said, "and Monsieur de

Brescou asked that you should enjoy the races unmolested."

"Oh," she said, disconcerted. "How much did you tell Thomas?"

"To look out for a Frenchie with a hawk's nose and keep him from annoying you, madam," Thomas said.

She was relieved, amused and, it seemed to me, grateful.

So Thomas, looking all six feet three a bodyguard, walked a pace behind the princess all afternoon, the princess behaving most of the time as if unaware of her shadow. She hadn't wanted to cancel her afternoon party, because she'd invited five friends to lunch, and she requested them, at my suggestion, not to leave her alone unless she herself asked it.

She was a far more likely target than de Brescou himself, I thought uneasily as I rode Hillsborough out onto the course. Her husband would never sign away his honor to save his own life, but to free an abducted wife . . . very likely.

Hillsborough felt dull in my hands, and I knew going down to the start that he wouldn't do much good. I tried to jolly him along once we'd started, but he stayed as sluggish as a cold engine and trailed in eighth of the twelve runners.

It couldn't be helped; one can't win them all. I was irritated, though, when an official came to the changing room afterward and said the stewards wanted to see me immediately. I followed him to the stewards' room, and there, as expected, was Maynard Allardeck, sitting at a table with two others, looking as impartial and reasonable as a saint. The stewards said they wanted to know why my well-backed mount had run so badly.

Maynard was almost certainly the instigator, but not the spokesman. One of the others, a man I respected, said for openers, "Mr. Fielding, explain the poor showing of Hillsborough."

He had himself ridden as an amateur in days gone by, and I told him straightforwardly that my horse had seemed not to be feeling well. He had been flat-footed even going down to the start.

The steward said, "Why didn't you use your whip?"

"I gave him a lot of signals to quicken, but he couldn't. Beating him wouldn't have made any difference."

"You appeared to be giving him an easy ride," he said, but without conviction. "What's your explanation?"

Giving a horse an easy ride was a euphemism for not trying to win, or even worse, for trying not to win, a loss-of-license matter. I said with some force, "Princess Casilia's horses, Mr. Harlow's horses, are always doing their best. Hillsborough was doing his best, but he was having an off day."

There was a shade of amusement in the steward's eyes. He knew, as everyone in racing knew, how things stood between Allardecks and Fieldings; for half a century stewards had sorted out the fiery accusations flung at Maynard's father by my grandfather, and my grandfather by Maynard's father, both of them training flat racers in Newmarket. The recent Allardeck presence on the power side of the table was no doubt highly funny to all but me.

"We note your explanation," the man said dryly, and let me go.

I went back fast to the changing room to exchange the princess's colors for those of another owner and to weigh out, but even so I was late into the parade ring for the next race. I walked over hurriedly to join the one little group without a jockey and saw, thirty feet away, Henri Nanterre.

Chapter 3

HE WAS standing in another group of owners, trainer and jockey and was looking my way as if he'd been watching my arrival.

Unwelcome as he was, however, I had to postpone thoughts of him, on account of the excited questions of the enthusiastic couple whose dreams I was supposed to make come true within the next ten minutes. The Dream, so named, had been a winner on the flat and was having his first run over hurdles. He proved to be fast, all right, but he hadn't learned the knack of jumping. He rattled the first three flights and put his feet straight through the fourth, and that was as far as we went. The Dream galloped away, loose in fright. I picked myself up from the grass and waited resignedly for wheels to roll along to pick me up. I checked in with the doctor, as one had to after every fall, and while changing for the next race made time to talk to the jockey from the group with Nanterre, Jamie Fingall, long a colleague.

"French guy with the beaky nose? Yeah, well, the guv'nor introduced him, but I didn't pay much attention. He owns horses in France, something like that."

Jamie Fingall's "guv'nor," Basil Clutter, trained in Lambourn about a mile down the road from my house, but there wasn't time to seek him out before the next race, the three-mile chase, and after that I had to change again and go out to meet the princess in the parade ring, where Kinley was already stalking around.

Kinley made up for an otherwise disgusting afternoon, sending my spirits soaring from depths to dizzy heights.

The rapport between us, established almost instantly during his first hurdle race the previous November, had so deepened in three succeeding outings that by February he seemed to know in advance what I wanted him to do, as I knew what he wanted to do before he did it. The result was racing at its sublime best. He won jauntily and at a canter. Maynard Allardeck, I grimly thought, walking Kinley back to the unsaddling enclosure, could find no excuse this time to carp or cavil.

The princess had her best stars in her blue eyes as I slid to the ground. "He's ready for Cheltenham," she said, sticking out a glove to pat the dark hide. "He's—" She stopped abruptly as she looked above my right shoulder. I whipped around fast. Henri Nanterre was there, staring at her.

I stood between them. Thomas and her friends were behind her, occupied with avoiding Kinley's lighthearted hoofs. Momentarily Nanterre transferred his gaze to my face, and then stared at me with his mouth opening. He was confounded, it seemed, to identify me from the evening before.

"You're . . ." he said, for once at a loss for loud words.

"That's right," I said. "What do you want?"

He recovered with a snap from his surprise, narrowed his eyes at the princess, and said distinctly, "Jockeys can have accidents."

"So can people who carry guns. Go away," I said, much as he'd said it to me a day earlier up in the box, and to my complete astonishment he went.

"Well, my dears," the princess said to her friends, laughing a trifle shakily, "let's go up and celebrate this lovely win. And Kit, come up soon."

"Yes, Princess."

I weighed in and, as it was my last ride of the day, changed into street clothes. After that I made a detour over to the saddling boxes, because Jamie had told me Basil Clutter would be there saddling up his runner for the last race.

Trainers in those places never had time to talk, but he did manage an answer or two. "Nanterre? Yes. Owns horses in France. Industrialist of some sort. Where's he staying? How should I know? Ask the Roquevilles. He was with them. Look, stop asking questions. Ring me tonight, right?"

"Right," I said, sighing. Basil Clutter was always bustling, saving money by being his own traveling head lad.

I went up to the princess's box, drank tea with lemon, and relived for her and her friends the glories of Kinley's jumping. When it was time to go, we traveled without trouble back to Eaton Square, where I telephoned to Wykeham from the bamboo room. He was pleased, he said, about Kinley but annoyed about Hillsborough. Dusty had told him I'd made no show and been hauled in by the stewards for it, and what did I think I was doing, getting into trouble two days in a row?

I could strangle Dusty, I thought, and told Wykeham what I'd told the stewards. "They accepted the explanation," I said. "Maynard Allardeck was one of them. He's after me whatever I do."

"Yes, I suppose he is." He cheered up and even chuckled. "Bookmakers are taking bets on when he'll get you suspended."

"Very funny," I said. "Good night, Wykeham."

I got through next to Basil Clutter, who told me the Roquevilles' number, and I caught them on their return from Newbury.

No, Bernard Roqueville said, he didn't know where Henri Nanterre was staying. Yes, he knew him, but not well. He'd met him in Paris at the races, and run into him by chance at Newbury. He regretted he couldn't help, and that was that.

A short lead going nowhere, I thought resignedly, and went downstairs to the sitting room and discussed Hillsborough's fall from grace over a drink with the princess. Later in the evening she, Roland de Brescou and I ate dinner together in the dining room, and I thought only about twenty times of Danielle at the Florentine gathering up north.

It wasn't until after ten, saying good night, that the princess spoke about Nanterre. "He said, didn't he, that jockeys have accidents? I couldn't forgive myself if you came to harm."

"It's only noise. He won't do anything," I said encouragingly, and she said quietly that she hoped not, and went to bed.

I wandered again around the big house, checking its defenses, and wondered what I'd overlooked.

In the morning I found out.

I WAS already awake at seven when the intercom buzzed and Dawson asked me to pick up the ordinary phone, as there was an incoming call for me. It was Wykeham on the line, his voice as incoherently agitated as I'd ever heard it.

"D-did you hear what I s-said?" he stuttered. "Two of them! Two of the p-princess's horses are d-dead."

"Two?" I sat bolt upright in bed, feeling cold. "Which two?"

"They're in their boxes. Stiff. They've been dead for hours."

"Which two?" I said again, fearfully.

"The two that ran on Friday."

I felt numb. "Do you mean Cascade . . . and Cotopaxi?" He *couldn't* mean it. Not Cotopaxi, not before the Grand National.

"Cascade," he said. "Cotopaxi."

"No. . . . How?"

"I've got the vet coming," he said. "Break it to the princess, Kit. Better than on the phone. They're like children to her. She'll have to say what she wants done with the carcasses. Though if they're poisoned . . ."

"Do you think they're poisoned?" I said.

"Don't know. Tell her now, Kit." He put his receiver down with a crash, and I replaced mine feeling that if Henri Nanterre had been there at that moment, I would have stuffed his plastic gun down his loud-voiced throat. Cascade and Cotopaxi. I grieved for them as for friends.

Dawson agreed that his wife would wake the princess and tell her I had some sad news of one of her horses and would wait for her in the sitting room. I dressed and went down there, and presently she came, without makeup and with anxious eyes.

"What is it?" she asked. "Which one?"

When I told her it was two, and which two, I watched her horror turn to horrified speculation. "Oh, no, he couldn't!" she exclaimed. "You don't think, do you . . . ?"

"If he has," I said, "he'll wish he hadn't."

She decided that we should go down to Wykeham's stable immediately. By eight thirty we were on the road.

Wykeham's establishment, an hour's drive south of London, was outside a small village on a slope of the Sussex Downs. Sprawling and complex, it had been enlarged haphazardly at intervals over a century and was attractive to owners because of its maze of unexpected little courtyards, with eight or ten boxes in each and holly bushes in red-painted tubs.

The princess's horses were spread through five courtyards. Wykeham, like many trainers, preferred to scatter an owner's horses about rather than to clump them all together. Cascade and Cotopaxi, as it happened, had been the only two belonging to the princess to be housed in the courtyard nearest the entrance drive.

When he heard us arrive, Wykeham came out to meet us. He looked older by the week, I thought uneasily. His white hair was blowing, his thin old hands were shaking.

"My dear Wykeham," the princess said. "You look so cold."

"Come into the house," he said. "That's best."

The princess hesitated. "Are my poor horses still here?"

He nodded miserably. "The vet's with them."

"Then I think I'll see them," she said, and walked firmly into the first courtyard, Wykeham and I following.

The doors of two of the boxes stood open, the interiors lit palely with electric light. All the other boxes were firmly closed. The princess walked slowly across to where her horses lay on the dark brown peat, their bodies silent humps, all flashing speed gone.

They had died with their night rugs on, but the vet or Wykeham or the lads had unbuckled those and rolled them back against the walls. We looked in silence at the dark sheen of Cascade and the snow-splashed chestnut of Cotopaxi.

Robin Curtiss, the tall, boyish vet, nodded to us all and excused himself from shaking hands, saying he would need to wash first.

The princess asked at once, "Please tell me, how did they die?"

Robin Curtiss told her straight. "Ma'am, they were shot. They knew nothing about it. They were shot with a humane killer. With a bolt." Cascade was lying slantwise across the box, not far from the door. Curtiss bent down, picking up the black forelock of hair that fell forward from between the horse's ears.

"You can't clearly see, ma'am, as he's so dark, but there's the spot, right under his forelock, where the bolt went in." He straightened up. "Easy to miss, unless you're looking for it."

The princess turned away from her dead horse with a glitter of tears. She stopped for a minute at the door of the next box, where Cotopaxi lay.

"He's the same," Robin Curtiss said. "Under the forelock, almost invisible. It was expert, ma'am. They didn't suffer."

She nodded. Then, unable to speak, she put one hand on Wykeham's arm and with the other waved toward the house. Robin Curtiss and I watched them go, and he sighed in sympathy.

"Poor lady. It always takes them hard."

"They were murdered," I said. "That makes it harder."

"Yeah, they sure were murdered. Wykeham's called the police, though I told him it wasn't strictly necessary. The law's very vague about killing animals. But I suppose he thought it best. You don't often see wounds like these nowadays."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Captive bullets are old hat. Almost no one uses them now."

"Captive bullets?"

"The bolt. Called captive because the killing agent doesn't fly free of the gun. The bolt is a metal rod that slides inside the barrel of an extra-heavy pistol. When the trigger is pulled, the metal rod shoots out, but because it's fixed inside to a spring, it retracts immediately into the barrel again. Surely you know that?"

"Yes. I mean, I know the bolt retracts. I saw one, close to, years ago. I didn't know they were old hat. What do you use now?"

"You must have seen a horse put down," he said, astonished. "All those times, on the course, when your mount breaks a leg."

"It's only happened to me twice," I said. "And both times I took my saddle off and walked away."

I found myself thinking about it, trying to explain. "One moment you're in partnership with that big creature, and maybe you like him, and the next moment he's going to die. So I've not wanted to stay to watch. I never have seen the gun actually put to the head, and I've always vaguely imagined it was shot from the side, like through a human temple."

"Well," he said, "you'd better get educated. Look at Cotopaxi's head." He picked his way over the stiff chestnut legs. "A horse's brain is only the size of a bunched fist. Most of his head is empty space, all sinuses. The brain is up between the ears, at the top of the neck. The bone in that area is pretty solid. There's only the one place where you can be sure a bolt will do the job." He picked up Cotopaxi's forelock and pointed to a small disturbance of the pale hairs. "You take a line from the right ear to the left eye," he said, "and a line from the left ear to the right eye. Where the lines cross, that's the best place to aim. And see? That's exactly where the bolt entered, and it was angled straight at the spot where the spinal cord and the brain meet. The result's instantaneous, and as you can see, there's no blood."

"And meanwhile the horse is simply letting all this happen?"

"Funnily enough, most of them do."

I looked down at the waste of the great racing spirit. I'd sat on that back, shared that mind, felt the fluid majesty of those muscles. I would still walk away, I thought, if another time came.

I made my way back to the outside air. Curtiss followed me. "I suppose you need a license for these humane killers," I said.

"Sure," he answered.

There must be thousands of them still about, I reflected. Every vet would have one. A great many farmers. People dealing with police horses. The probabilities seemed endless.

"What time do you think this happened?"

"Early. Not much after midnight. Both horses were stone cold this morning. No internal temperature. That takes hours. There'll have to be postmortems. The insurance people insist on it." He gestured toward the house. "We may as well go in."

"And leave them here?"

"They're not going anywhere," he said, but he turned and shut the boxes' doors.

We went into Wykeham's house, ancient and rambling to match the yard, and found him and the princess consoling themselves with tea and memories. Wykeham rose to his feet at our appearance and bustled me into the kitchen. "Why doesn't she ask who killed them?" he said. "She hasn't mentioned it once."

"Mm," I said. "She suspects she knows who killed them."

"What? For heaven's sake, then, Kit, who?"

"She'd have to tell you herself," I said, "but it's something to do with her husband's business. For what it's worth, I don't think you need worry about a traitor in your own camp. She won't tell anyone who she thinks it is until she's discussed it with her husband. And they might decide to say nothing even then, they hate publicity so much."

"There's going to be publicity anyway," he said worriedly. "The cofavorite for the Grand National shot in his box. . . ."

I rattled about making fresh tea for Robin and myself, not relishing any more than Wykeham did the fuss lying ahead.

"All the same," I said, "your main worry isn't who. Your main worry is keeping all the others safe."

"Kit!" He was totally appalled.

"Well," I said temperately, but there was no way to soften it, "I'd say they're all at risk. The whole lot of her horses. Not immediately, not today. But if the princess and her husband decide on one particular course of action, which they may do, then they'll all be at risk—Kinley, perhaps, above all. So the thing to do is to apply our minds to defensive action. Dog patrols. Get them here by tonight, and make sure there's someone in the stable the whole time, patrolling all the courtyards night and day."

"All right," he said slowly. "I'll fix it. If I knew who'd killed those horses, I'd kill him myself."

It sounded extraordinary, said that way, without anger, but Wykeham thought of little besides his horses, cared for little else, walked around at evening stables talking to each as a person, playing with some, admonishing others, ignoring none.

I'd ridden for him since I was nineteen, and he'd steadfastly given me exactly what he gave his charges: opportunity, trust, and job satisfaction. A contemporary of my grandfather (and of Maynard Allardeck's father), Wykeham had already been a legend to me when he'd offered me the job. I'd accepted, almost dazed, and grown up fast from the demands he'd thrust on me.

Wykeham had been a Hercules in his youth, a powerhouse on legs, with the joy of life pumping through his veins. He'd been an amateur jockey of note, and he'd dazzled and married the daughter of a moderately successful trainer whose horses had started winning from the day Wykeham stepped into the yard. Now, fifty years later, with his strength gone, his wife dead and his own daughters grandmothers, he retained only the priceless ability to put the joy of life into his horses.

He'd trained a Grand National winner twice when I'd been at school, and in my time had come close, but it was only recently I'd realized how deeply he longed for a third slice of glory. The dead horse outside was for us all a sickening, deflating disappointment.

"Cotopaxi," he said intensely, for once getting the name right, "was the one I would have saved first in a fire."

Chapter 4

THE princess and I traveled back to London without waiting for the police. When we reached Eaton Square, she said we would go into the sitting room for a drink, "to cheer ourselves up."

This good plan was revised, however, because the sitting room wasn't empty. Prince Litsi and Danielle stood up as the princess walked in.

"My dear aunt," the prince said, bowing. "Good morning."

"Good morning," she said faintly, and kissed Danielle. "I thought you were returning late this evening."

"The weather was frightful." The prince shook my hand. "Rain. Mist. Freezing. We decided we'd had enough and left early today, before breakfast."

I kissed Danielle's smooth cheek, wanting much more. She looked briefly into my eyes and said Dawson had told them I was staying in the house. I hadn't seen her for three weeks, and I didn't want to hear about Dawson. Around the princess, however, one kept raw emotions under wraps, and I heard myself asking Danielle if she'd enjoyed the art lectures as if I hoped she had.

"They were great."

The princess decided to go upstairs to see her husband. "You pour the drinks," she said to her nephew. "And you, Kit, tell them everything that's been happening, will you? My dears . . . such horrid troubles." She waved a hand vaguely and went away, her back straight and slender, a statement in itself.

The prince and I stood assessing each other, he taller, ten years older, a big man with heavy shoulders, a large head and pale, intelligent eyes. He looked as impressive as I'd remembered him to be. It had been a year or more since we'd last met.

From his point of view I suppose he saw brown, curly hair, light brown eyes and a leanness imposed by the weights allocated to racehorses. Perhaps he saw also the man whose fiancée he had lured away to esoteric delights, but to do him justice, there was nothing in his face of triumph or amusement.

"I'd like a drink," Danielle said abruptly. She sat down.

Litsi turned to busy himself with the bottles. Without inquiring, he poured white wine for Danielle and Scotch for himself and me. "Okay?" he said, proffering the glass.

"Yes, sir."

"Call me Litsi. There's no throne anymore. I live in the modern world. I like to drop the protocol in private. So, will you let me?"

"Yes," I said. "If you like."

"There you are, then." He waved a large hand, the subject closed. "Tell us what has been disturbing the household."

I looked at Danielle, dressed that day in black trousers, white shirt, blue sweater. She wore the usual pink lipstick, her cloudy dark hair held back in a blue band—everything known and loved and familiar. I wanted fiercely to hold her and feel her warmth against me, but she was sitting very firmly in an armchair built for one, and she would meet my eyes for only a flicker or two.

I'm losing her, I thought, and couldn't bear it.

"Kit," the prince said, sitting down.

I sat down also and began the long recital, starting with Henri Nanterre's bullying invasion on Friday afternoon and ending with the dead horses in Wykeham's stable that morning. Litsi listened with increasing dismay, Danielle with simpler indignation.

"That's wicked," she said. "Poor Aunt Casilia." She frowned. "I guess it's not right to knuckle under to threats, but why is Uncle Roland so against guns? They're made all over the place."

"In France," Litsi said, "for a man of Roland's background to deal in guns would be considered despicable."

"But he doesn't live in France," Danielle said.

"He lives in himself." Litsi glanced my way. "You understand, don't you, why he can't?"

"Yes," I said.

Danielle sighed. "The European mind, I guess."

A voice on the stairs interrupted the discussion, a loud female voice, coming nearer.

"Where is everyone? In there?" She swept into view in the sitting-room doorway. "Dawson says the bamboo room is occupied. That's ridiculous. I always have the bamboo room. I've told Dawson to remove the things of whoever is in there."

Dawson gave me a bland look from over her shoulder and continued on his way up the stairs, carrying a suitcase.

"Now, then," said the vision in the doorway. "Someone fix me a Bloody. The damn plane was two hours late."

"Good grief," Danielle said faintly. "Aunt Beatrice."

AUNT Beatrice, Roland de Brescou's sister, spoke with a slight French accent heavily overlaid with American. She had a mass of hair, white going on pale orange. This framed a round face with round eyes and an expression of habitual determination.

"Danielle!" Beatrice said. "What are you doing here?"

"I work in England." Danielle gave her aunt a dutiful peck. "Since last fall."

"Nobody tells me anything." She was wearing a silk suit with a heavy seal on a gold chain shining in front. Her fistful of rings looked like ounce-heavy nuggets, and a crocodile had passed on for her handbag. Beatrice, in short, enjoyed her cash. She was clearly about to ask who Litsi and I were when the princess entered, having come downstairs, I reckoned, at record speed.

"Beatrice," she said, advancing with both hands outstretched. "What a delightful surprise." She gave her sister-in-law two welcoming kisses, and I saw that her eyes were cold with dismay.

"Surprise?" Beatrice said as they disengaged. "I called on Friday and spoke to your secretary. I told her to be sure to give you the message, and she said she would leave a note."

"Oh." A look of comprehension crossed the princess's face. "I expect it's down in the office. We've been . . . rather busy."

"Casilia, about the bamboo room—" Beatrice began, and the princess with dexterity interrupted her.

"Do you know my nephew, Litsi?" she said. "Litsi, this is

Roland's sister, Beatrice de Brescou Bunt. Did you leave Palm Beach last evening, Beatrice? Such a long flight."

"Casilia." Beatrice shook hands with Litsi. "The bam—"

"And this is Danielle's fiancé, Christmas Fielding," the princess went on. "I don't think you've met him either. And now, my dear Beatrice, some tomato juice and vodka?"

"Casilia!" Beatrice said. "I always have the bamboo room."

I opened my mouth to say obligingly that I didn't mind moving and received a look of pure steel from the princess. I shut my mouth, amazed and amused.

"Mrs. Dawson is unpacking your things in the rose room, Beatrice," the princess said. "You'll be very comfortable there."

Beatrice, furious but outmaneuvered, allowed a genial Litsi to concoct her a Bloody Mary. "And now," she said, "what's all this rubbish about Roland refusing to expand the business?"

After a frosty second of immobility the princess sat down in an armchair, crossing wrists and ankles in artificial composure.

Beatrice repeated her question. She was never, I discovered, one to give up. Litsi busied himself with settling her into a chair and giving the princess time for mental remustering.

He sat in a third armchair, and Danielle and I took places on a sofa, although with half an acre of flowered chintz between us.

"Roland is being obstructionist, and I've come to tell him I object," said Beatrice. "He must change his mind at once. It is ridiculous not to move with the times and look for new markets."

"How do you know of any business proposals?" the princess asked.

"That dynamic young son of Louis Nanterre told me, of course. He made a special journey to see me, and explained the whole thing. He asked me to persuade Roland to drag himself into the twentieth century, let alone the twenty-first."

"You do know," I said, "he proposes to make and export guns?"

"Of course," she said. "But only plastic parts of guns. Roland is old-fashioned. I've a friend in Palm Beach whose husband's corporation makes missiles for the Defense Department. Where's the difference?" She paused. "And what business is it of yours?"

"Beatrice," the princess said, "I'm sure you'll want to rest after your journey. Dawson is arranging a late lunch for us."

"I want to talk to Roland," Beatrice said obstinately.

"Yes, later. He's resting just now." The princess stood, and Danielle's aunt gave in and went, albeit grumbling that she expected to be reinstated in the bamboo room the next day.

"She's relentless," Danielle said as Beatrice's voice faded away.

"Why did Henri Nanterre recruit your aunt Beatrice so diligently?" Litsi asked. "She won't change Roland's mind."

"She lives on de Brescou money," Danielle said unexpectedly. "My parents do, as well, since my black sheep of a father went bankrupt. Uncle Roland set up generous trusts for everybody out of the revenues from his company, but for as long as I've known my aunt, she's complained he could afford more. She married an American businessman way, way back, and after he died she went to live in a marvelous Spanish-style house in Palm Beach. Every summer she travels in Europe and spends some time in 'our château,' as she calls it."

Litsi was nodding. "Aunt Casilia and Roland," he explained unnecessarily, "go to the Château de Brescou in July and August, to seek some country air and play their part as landowners."

"What's the château like?" Danielle asked.

"Not a Disney castle," Litsi answered, smiling. "More like a large Georgian country house, built of light-colored stone, with shutters on all the windows. The local town is built on land south of Bordeaux mostly owned by Roland, and he takes moral and civic pride in its well-being. His estates are run as the company used to be, with good managers and scrupulous fairness."

"He *cannot*," I commented, "deal in arms."

Danielle sighed. "I do see," she admitted, "that with all that old aristocratic honor, he simply couldn't face it."

"But I'm surprised," I said, "that Beatrice could face it so easily. I would think she would share her brother's feelings."

"I'll bet," Danielle said, "Henri Nanterre promised her a million-dollar handout if she got Uncle Roland to change his mind."

Litsi was thoughtful. "Do you think she's a threat?" he asked me.

"I think she could be like water dripping on a stone, wearing it away."

"The water torture," Litsi said. "I'm told it feels like a red-hot poker after a while, drilling a hole into the skull."

"She's just like that," Danielle said.

There was a short silence while we contemplated the boring capacities of Beatrice de Brescou Bunt.

"Upstairs," I said, reflecting, "I've got what I think is a duplicate of the form Henri Nanterre wanted Monsieur de Brescou to sign. It is in French. Would you like to see it?"

"Very much," Litsi said.

"Right." I went upstairs to fetch it and found Beatrice Bunt and the princess outside my door.

"Danielle's fiancé," the princess was saying, "stays in the bamboo room as long as he stays in this house. Now come along, Beatrice. The rose room is very comfortable, you'll find."

"It's half the size of this one, and there's no dressing room."

The princess concealed her irritation admirably. "When Kit leaves, you shall have the bamboo room, of course."

"I thought you said his name was Christmas."

"So it is," the princess agreed. "He was born on Christmas Day. Come along, Beatrice. Let's go down for this very delayed lunch." She sent her guest ahead and returned to me for one brief and remarkable sentence, half instruction, half entreaty.

"Stay in this house," she said, "until she is gone."

AFTER lunch Litsi, Danielle and I went up to the bamboo room to look at the form. I retrieved it from the bedside-table drawer and gave it to Litsi, who wandered with it over to a group of comfortable chairs near the window. He read it attentively, sitting down absentmindedly, a big man with natural presence and unextended power. I liked him and because of Danielle feared him, a contradictory jumble of emotion.

After a while he raised his head and frowned. "For a start," he said, "this is not an application for a license to make arms. Are you sure Nanterre said it was?"

I thought back. "As far as I remember, Gerald Greening said it was a government form for preliminary application for a license."

"Well, it isn't a government form at all. It isn't an application for any sort of license. What it is, is a very vague and general form that would be used by simple people to draw up a contract." He paused. "One simply inserts in the spaces what one wants done, like leaving the car to one's grandson. It's what's written into the spaces that really counts. Still, the legal form of words is correct, so this would be a binding document." He glanced down at the paper. "It's impossible to tell, of course, how Henri Nanterre had filled in all the spaces, but I would guess that overall it would say merely that the parties named in the contract had agreed on the course of action outlined by the accompanying documents. I would think the form would act as page one of a bulk of papers including all sorts of things like factory capacity, overseas sales forces, the specifications of the guns to be manufactured. With this in his hands Nanterre could apply for his license immediately."

"But all four of us have to sign now," Danielle said. "What if we all say we won't?"

"I think," I said, "if your uncle decided to sign, you would all follow his lead."

Litsi nodded. "The four-signature agreement is a delaying tactic, not a solution."

"And what," Danielle said flatly, "is a solution?"

Litsi looked my way. "Put Kit to work on it." He smiled. "Danielle told me you tied all sorts of strong men into knots last November. Can't you do it again?"

"This is a bit different," I said.

"What happened last time?" he asked.

"A newspaper was giving my sister, Holly, and her husband a lot of unearned bad publicity—he's a racehorse trainer, and they said he was going broke—and basically I got them to apologize and pay Bobby some compensation."

"And Bobby's appalling father, Maynard Allardeck," Danielle said. "Tell Litsi about him."

She could look at me, as now, as if everything were the same. I tried to keep my general anxiety about her from showing too much and told the story to Litsi.

"The real reason for the attacks on Bobby was to get at his father, who'd been trying to take over the newspaper. Maynard Allardeck was in line for a knighthood, and the newspaper's idea was to discredit him so that he shouldn't get one. Maynard was a ruthless burden on Bobby's back. So I . . . er, got him off."

"How?" Litsi asked curiously.

"Maynard," I said, "makes fortunes by lending money to dicky businesses. He puts them straight and then calls in the loan. The businesses can't repay him, so he takes them over, and shortly after sells off all the assets. The smiling shark comes along and gobbles up the grateful minnows, who don't discover their mistake until they're half digested."

"So what did you do?" Litsi said.

"Well, I went around filming interviews with some of the people he had damaged. They were pretty emotional stuff. An old couple he'd cheated out of a star racehorse, a man whose son committed suicide when he lost his business, and a foolish boy who'd been led into gambling away half his inheritance."

"I saw the film," Danielle said. "It hit like hammers. Kit threatened to send copies to all sorts of people if Maynard did any more harm to Bobby. And you've forgotten to say," she said to me, "that Maynard tried to get Bobby to kill you."

Litsi blinked. "To kill . . ."

"Mm," I said. "He's paranoid about Bobby marrying my sister. He's been programmed from birth to hate all Fieldings." I explained about the depth and bitterness of the feud. "Bobby and I have made it up and are friends, but his father can't stand that."

"Bobby thinks," Danielle said to me, "Maynard can't stand your success. He wouldn't feel so murderous with a lousy jockey."

"Maynard," I told Litsi, smiling, "is a member of the Jockey Club and also now turns up quite often as a steward at various racecourses. He would dearly like to see me lose my license."

"Which he can't manage unfairly," Litsi said thoughtfully, "because of the existence of the film."

"It's a standoff," I agreed equably.

Later that Sunday afternoon I telephoned Wykeham, and listened to the weariness in his voice. His day had been a procession of frustrations and difficulties not yet over.

"A policeman came," Wykeham said. "A detective constable. He said it was probably some boys' prank. I ask you! I told him it was no prank to shoot two horses expertly! Pete, the lad who looked after Cotopaxi, has been in tears, and the others were all indignant. It's worse for them than having one killed accidentally."

"For us all," I said.

"Yes." He sighed. "I loved both those horses."

When Wykeham said he loved a horse, he meant it. He wouldn't yet have the same feeling for Kinley, I thought. Kinley, yesterday's hurdle winner, the bright star, young and fizzing. Kinley was excitement, not an old buddy.

"Look after Kinley," I said.

"Yes. I've moved him. He's in the corner box."

The corner box, always the last to be used, couldn't be reached from any courtyard, only through another box. Its position was a nuisance for the lads, but it was also the safest place in the stable.

"That's great," I said with relief. "Now, what about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?"

"Plumpton races."

There was a silence while he reorganized his thoughts. He always sent a bunch of horses to Plumpton, one of his nearest courses, and I was riding six of them.

"Dusty has a list," he said eventually. "Just ride them as you think best."

"All right."

"Good night, then, Kit."

"Good night, Wykeham."

At least he'd got my name right, I thought, disconnecting. Perhaps all the right horses would arrive at Plumpton.

I went down there on the train the next morning, feeling glad to be away from the Eaton Square house. Even diluted by the princess, Litsi and Danielle, an evening spent with Beatrice de Brescou Bunt had opened vistas of social punishment I would as soon have remained closed.

When I'd left in the morning, Litsi had said he would himself spend most of the day with Roland after John Grundy, the nurse, had left. The princess and Danielle would occupy Beatrice. Danielle, working evening shifts at her television news company in Chiswick, would have to leave it all to the princess after five thirty. I had promised to return from Plumpton as soon as possible, but truthfully, I was happy to be presented with a good reason not to, in the shape of a message awaiting me in the changing room. Relayed from the stable manager at Newbury racecourse, the note requested me to remove my car from where I'd left it, as the space was urgently required for something else.

I telephoned Eaton Square, and Danielle answered. I explained about the car. "I'll get a lift from Plumpton to Newbury. I think I'd better sleep at home in Lambourn, though, as I've got to go to Devon to race tomorrow. Will you apologize to the princess? Tell her I'll come back tomorrow night after racing."

"Deserter," Danielle said. "You sound suspiciously pleased."

"It does make sense in terms of miles," I said.

"Tell it to the marines."

"Look after yourself," I said.

She said, "Yes," on a sigh and disconnected. Sometimes it seemed everything was the same between us, and then, on a sigh, it wasn't. Without much enthusiasm I went in search of Dusty, who had arrived with the right horses and the right colors for me to wear. We stage-managed the afternoon between us, he producing and saddling the horses, I riding them, both of us doing a public relations job on the owners, congratulating, commiserating and explaining. It was a typical day: two winners, a second, two also-rans and a faller, who gave me a soft landing and no problems.

"Thanks, Dusty," I said at the end. "Six races is a busy day for you, and it all went well."

He gave me an unsmiling nod and hurried off. Another jockey gave me a lift back to Newbury, and I collected my car from its extended parking there and drove home to my house on the hill.

I lit the log fire to cheer things up a bit, ate some grilled chicken, and played back all the messages on my answering machine. A whole column of newsmen wanted to know my feelings on the loss of Cotopaxi. Just as well, I thought, that I hadn't been at home to express them. Then I went peacefully to bed.

Chapter 5

THE telephone woke me at approximately two thirty.

"Hello," I said sleepily. "Who is it?"

"Kit . . ."

I came wide awake in a split second. It was Danielle's voice, very distressed.

"Where are you?" I said.

"I . . . oh . . . I need . . . I'm in a shop."

"Did you say shock or shop?" I said.

She gulped audibly. "Both, I suppose."

"What's happened? Take a deep breath. Tell me slowly."

"I left the studio . . . ten after two . . . started to drive home." She always finished at two, when all the American news gatherers left for the night. She drove her own small Ford back to the garage behind Eaton Square where Thomas kept the Rolls.

"Go on," I said.

"A car seemed to be following me. Then I had a flat tire. I had to stop. I . . ." She swallowed again. "I found I had two tires almost flat. And the other car stopped, and a man got out. He was wearing . . . a hood."

Oh, no, I thought.

"I ran. He started after me. . . . I ran and ran. . . . I saw this shop. It's open all night, and I ran in. But the man here doesn't like it. He let me use his telephone . . . but I've no money. I left my purse and my coat in the car. And I don't know what to do."

"What you do," I said, "is stay there until I reach you."

"Yes, but the man here doesn't want me to. And I can't, I simply can't go outside. I'm frightened."

"Yes, you've good reason to be. I'll come at once. You let me talk to the man in the shop. And don't worry, I'll be there in under an hour."

She said, "All right," faintly, and in a few seconds an Asian-sounding voice said, "Hello?"

"My young lady," I said, "needs your help. You keep her warm, give her a hot drink, make her comfortable until I arrive, and I'll pay you."

"Cash," he said economically. "Fifty pounds."

"For that," I said, "you look after her very well indeed. And now tell me your address. How do I find you?"

He gave me directions. I dressed, swept some spare clothes into a bag, and broke the speed limit to London. After a few wrong turns I found the street and the row of dark shops, with one brightly lit near the end. I stopped with a jerk and went inside.

The place was a narrow minisupermarket with a take-out hot-food cabinet near the door, the rest of the space packed to the ceiling with provisions smelling subtly of spices. Two customers were choosing hot food, a third farther down the shop was looking at cans, but there was no sign of Danielle.

The Asian man serving looked up as I hurried in.

"The young lady," I said. "Where is she?"

"She is safe."

"Where?" I asked, growing anxious.

"At the back of the shop, behind the door. Give me the money."

I gave him what he'd asked, left him counting it, and fairly sprinted to where he'd pointed. The door led into a room piled with more stock in brown cardboard boxes, leaving only a small space for a desk and a chair. Danielle was sitting on the chair, huddled into a big, dark, masculine overcoat.

"Hi," I said.

The look of relief on her face was as good, I supposed, as a passionate kiss, which actually I didn't get. She slid into my arms, though, as if coming home, and I held her tight, smoothing her hair and breathing deeply with content.

She slowly disengaged herself after a while, though I could have stood there for hours.

"You must think me stupid," she said shakily. "An utter fool. I'm so glad to see you." It was heartfelt, true.

"Come on, then," I said, much comforted. "We'd best be going." She slid out of the overcoat and shivered a little in her shirt, sweater and trousers. "There's a rug in my car," I said. "And then we'll go and fetch your coat."

She nodded, and we went through the shop toward the street door. "Thank you," I said to the Asian. He didn't answer.

"Where did you leave the Ford?" I asked when we were safely in my car.

She had difficulty remembering. "I'd gone only two miles, I guess, when I realized I had a flat. I pulled off the highway. If we go back toward the studio . . ."

"We'll find it," I said. "You can't have run far." And we found it in fact quite easily, its rear pointing toward us down a seedy side turning as we coasted along.

I left her in my car while I took a look. Her coat and handbag had vanished, also the windshield wipers and the radio. Remarkable, I thought, that the car itself was still there, despite the two flat tires, as the keys were in the ignition. I took them out, locked the doors, and went back to Danielle.

"You still have a car," I said, "but it could be stripped or gone by morning if we don't get it towed."

She nodded numbly and stayed in my car while I found an all-night garage with a tow truck. Sure, they said, they would fetch it, fix the tires, and have it ready in the morning.

It wasn't until we were again on our way toward Eaton Square that Danielle said any more about her would-be attacker.

"Do you think he was a rapist?" she asked tautly.

"It seems . . . well . . . likely, I'm afraid." I tried to picture him. "What sort of clothes was he wearing? What sort of hood?"

"I didn't notice," she began, and then realized that she remembered more than she'd thought. "A suit. An ordinary man's suit. And polished leather shoes. The light shone on them, and I could hear them tapping on the ground. How odd. The hood was . . . a woolen hat, dark, pulled down, with holes for eyes and mouth."

"Horrible," I said with sympathy.

"I think he was waiting for me to leave the studio." She shuddered. "Do you think he fixed my tires?"

"Two flats at once is no coincidence."

"What do you think I should do?"

"Tell the police?" I suggested.

"No, certainly not. They think any young woman driving alone in the middle of the night is asking for trouble." She decided to tell only her colleagues in the studio, saying they should step up security around the parked cars. Some of the tension was at last leaving her voice. "There wasn't much in my purse, that's one good thing. Just lipstick and a hairbrush, not much money. No credit cards. I never take much with me to work."

"What about keys? The front-door key of Eaton Square?"

"Yes," she said, dismayed.

"Did you have anything with the Eaton Square address on it?"

"No." She was positive. "I had no letters or anything like that."

"That's something." I pressed her no further. It wasn't until we were nearly back to Eaton Square that I wondered whether the hooded man could possibly have been not a rapist at all, but Henri Nanterre; if in fact this had been part of his campaign of harassment. But he had no reason to know Danielle was in England, even if he knew of her actual existence.

"You're very quiet all of a sudden," Danielle said. "What are you thinking?"

I glanced at her. Three or four times we'd known what the other was thinking, in the sort of telepathic jump that sometimes occurred between people who knew each other well, but I hoped at that moment that she couldn't read my thoughts.

"This evening," I said, "get Thomas to drive you to work, and I'll fetch you. I should be back in Eaton Square by nine."

"All right, I guess. Thanks."

I parked my car where hers stood usually, and we walked around to Eaton Square.

We went indoors and quietly up the stairs. When we reached her floor, I put my arms around her, again holding her close. "Good night," I said. "Will you be all right?"

"Yes." She would hardly meet my eyes. "I do thank you." She put her arms around my neck and gave me a quick kiss at least reminiscent of better times, even if it landed somewhere on my chin. "Good night," she said lightly, and walked away to her room, without looking back, and I went on upstairs feeling a good deal better than the day before.

AROUND seven fifteen in the morning I knocked on Litsi's door until a sleepy voice said, "Who is it?"

"Kit."

A short silence, then, "Come in."

The room was dark; Litsi was stretching to switch on a bedside lamp. The light revealed a large, oak-paneled room with a four-poster bed, brocade curtaining and ancestral paintings. Very suitable, I thought, for Litsi.

"I thought you weren't here," he said, rubbing his eyes.

"I came back before five this morning, and that's what I've come to tell you about."

He sat up straight while he listened. "Do you think it really was Nanterre?" he said when I'd finished.

"If it was, perhaps he wanted only to catch her and frighten her, tell her what could happen if her uncle didn't give in. Anyway, I thought I'd better warn you."

I told him about Danielle's missing handbag. "If it was an ordinary thief, it would be all right, because there was no connecting address, but if Nanterre took it, he now has a key to this house. Do you think you could explain to the princess and get the lock changed? I'm off to Devon to ride a few races, and I'll be here again this evening. I'm picking Danielle up when she finishes work. See if you can find out," I added, "if Danielle told her aunt Beatrice what time she leaves work."

He blinked.

"Henri Nanterre," I pointed out, "has a spy in this house. How else did he know where to find Danielle?"

"Go and break your neck," he said companionably.

I smiled and went away, and caught the train to Devon. I wouldn't say that I rode exactly carefully that day at Newton Abbot, but it was certainly without the reckless fury of the past two weeks. Maybe Danielle would finally come back to me, maybe she wouldn't. I had a better chance right under her eyes than two hundred miles away and injured in a hospital.

I caught the return train on schedule, dined on a railway sandwich, and was back at Eaton Square before nine. I had to get Dawson to let me in, because the lock had indeed been changed. I went up to the sitting room, opening the door there on the princess, Litsi and Beatrice Bunt, all sitting immobile in private separate silences, as if covered by vacuum bell jars.

"Good evening," I said, my voice sounding loud.

They all came alive, as if I had waved a wand over a waxwork.

"You're back!" Litsi said. "Thank heavens for that, at least."

"What's happened?" I asked. "Is Danielle all right?"

The princess looked surprised. "Yes, of course. Thomas drove her to work." She was sitting on a sofa, her back straight, her head high, every muscle on the defensive.

"What's happened?" I asked again.

It was Litsi who answered. "Henri Nanterre telephoned here about an hour ago. He wanted to speak to Roland, but Roland refused, so he asked for me by name."

My eyebrows rose.

"He said he knew my name as one of the three others who had to sign business directives with Roland. He said Danielle and the princess were the others; his notary had remembered."

I frowned. "I suppose he might have remembered if someone had told him the names. He might have recognized them."

Litsi nodded. "Henri Nanterre said that his notary had left his briefcase in Roland's sitting room. In the briefcase is a contract with spaces at the bottom for signatures and witnesses. He says all four of us are to sign this contract in the presence of his notary, in a place that he will designate. He said he would telephone each evening until everyone had agreed."

"Or else?" I said.

"He mentioned," Litsi said evenly, "that it would be a shame for the princess to lose more of her horses and that young women out alone at night were always at risk." He paused, one eyebrow lifting. "He said that princes weren't immune from accidents and that a certain jockey, if he wished to stay healthy, should remove himself from the household and mind his own business."

"We have asked Beatrice," the princess said with brittle politeness, "if she has spoken with Henri Nanterre since her arrival in this house, but she tells us she doesn't know where he is."

I looked at Beatrice, who stared implacably back. It wasn't necessary to know where someone actually was if he had a telephone number, but there seemed to be no point in making her upgrade the evasion into a straightforward lie, which the boldness in her eyes assured me we would get.

The princess said that her husband had asked to talk to me on my return, and suggested that I go upstairs. So I went.

He was looking, I thought, not so physically frail as on Friday and Saturday, but not so determined either. "It is going to take time to arrange my retirement," he said. "And as soon as I make any positive moves, Henri Nanterre will find out. . . . Has Litsi told you about Nanterre's telephone call?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"The horses, Danielle, my wife, Litsi, yourself—I cannot leave you all open to harm. Gerald Greening advises that I sign the contract, and then as soon as Nanterre gets his firearms approval, I can sell all my interest in the business. Nanterre will have to agree. I shall make it a condition before signing. Everyone will guess I have sold because of the guns. Some, at least, of my reputation may be salvaged." A spasm of distress twisted his mouth. "It is in the greatest conceivable personal disgrace that I sign this contract, but I see no other way."

He fell silent but with an implied question. After a short pause I gave my answer. "Don't sign, monsieur," I said.

He looked at me with the first trace of a smile. "Litsi said you would say that."

"Did he? And what did Litsi himself say?"

"What would you think?"

"Don't sign," I said.

"You and Litsi." Again the fugitive smile. "So different. So alike. He described you as 'a tough devil with brains.' He said I should give you and him time to find a way to deter Nanterre permanently, that only if both of you failed should I think of signing."

"And did you agree?"

"If you yourself wish it, I will agree."

A commitment to positive action was a lot different from raising defenses. I thought of the horses, and the princess, and Danielle, and really there was no question. "I wish it," I said.

"Very well, but I do hope nothing appalling will happen."

I said we would try our best to prevent it and asked if he would mind having a guard in the house every day during John Grundy's off-duty hours. "Not in your rooms, monsieur. Moving about. You would hardly notice him. And may we also install a telephone that records what's said?"

"Do what you think best," he said; and then, with an almost mischievous smile, he asked, "Has Beatrice got you out of the bamboo room yet?"

"No, monsieur," I said cheerfully.

"She was up here this morning demanding I move you," he said, the smile lingering. "She insists also that I allow Nanterre to run the business as he thinks best, but truly I don't know which of her purposes obsesses her most. She switched from one to the other within the same sentence." He paused. "If you can defeat my sister," he said, "Nanterre should be easy."

Chapter 6

By midmorning of the following day I'd been out to buy a recording telephone, and the guard had been installed, in the unconventional form of a springy twenty-year-old who had learned karate in the cradle. Beatrice predictably disapproved of him, particularly as he nearly knocked her over on one of the landings, in the course of proving he could run from the basement to the attic faster than the elevator could travel the same distance.

He told me his name was Sammy, and he was deeply impressed by the princess, whom he called Your Regal Highness, to her discreet and friendly amusement.

"Are you sure about him?" she said to me tentatively.

"He comes with the highest references," I assured her. "His employer promised he could kick a pistol out of anyone's hand before it was fired."

Sammy's slightly poltergeist spirits seemed to cheer the princess, and with firmness she announced that all of us, including Beatrice, should go to the races. Lunch was already ordered there, at Ascot, and Sammy would guard her husband.

Beatrice went with the princess in the Rolls; Danielle and Litsi came with me. Danielle, subdued, sat in the back. She had been quiet when I'd fetched her during the night. I told her about Nanterre's telephone call and also about her uncle's agreement with Litsi and me, and although her eyes looked huge with worry, all she'd said was, "Do be careful. Both of you."

At Ascot it was with unmixed feelings of jealousy that I watched Litsi take her away in the direction of the princess's lunch while I peeled off, as one might say, to the office.

I had four races to ride: one for the princess, two others for Wykeham, one for a Lambourn trainer. Dusty was in a bad mood, Maynard Allardeck had again turned up as a steward, and the tree of my favorite saddle, my valet told me, had disintegrated. Apart from that it was bitterly cold, and apart from that I had somehow gained another pound, probably via the railway sandwich.

Wykeham's first runner was a four-year-old former flat racer out for his first experience over hurdles, and although I'd schooled him a few times over practice jumps on Wykeham's gallops, I hadn't been able to teach him courage. He went around the whole way letting me know he hated it, and I had difficulty thinking of anything encouraging to say to his owners afterward. A horse that didn't like racing was a waste of time and money.

The second of Wykeham's runners finished nowhere also, not from unwillingness—he was kindhearted and surefooted—but from being nowhere near fast enough against the opposition.

I went out for the princess's race with a low *joie de vivre* rating, a feeling not cured by seeing Danielle walk into the parade ring holding on to Litsi's arm and laughing. The princess, who had arrived there first, followed my gaze and gently tapped my arm. "She's in a muddle," she said distinctly. "Give her time."

She must have felt very strongly that I needed advice or she wouldn't have given it.

I said, "All right," and she turned to greet the others.

"Where's Beatrice?" she asked.

"She said it was too cold. She stayed up in the box," Litsi said, and to me he added, "Do we put our money on?"

Col, the princess's runner, was stalking around in his navy-blue, gold-crested rug, looking bored. He was a horse of limited enthusiasm, difficult to ride because if he reached the front too soon he would lose interest and stop, and if one left the final run too late and got beaten, one looked and felt a fool.

"Don't back him," I said. It was that sort of day.

"Yes, back him," the princess said simultaneously.

"Frightfully helpful," Litsi commented, amused.

Col was a bright chestnut with a white blaze down his nose and three white socks. At Cheltenham he was entered for the Gold Cup, the top event of the meeting, and although not a hot fancy, he had a realistic chance of being placed.

"Do your best," the princess said, as she often did, and as usual I said I would. I cantered Col down to the start, trying to wind up a bit of life-force for us both. A gloomy jockey on a bored horse might as well go straight back to the stable.

By the time we started, I was telling him we were out there to do a job of work, and by the third of the twenty-two fences there were some faint stirrings in both of us of the ebb turning to flood.

Most of the art of jump racing lay in presenting a horse at a fence so that he could cross it without slowing. Col was one of the comparatively rare sort that could judge distances on his own, leaving his jockey free to worry about tactics, but he would never quicken unless one insisted. We traveled most of the three miles in fourth or fifth place and came up into third on the last bend, when two of the early leaders tired.

There were three fences still to go, with a run-in of two hundred and forty yards after. One of the horses ahead was still chock full of running; it was his speed Col would have to exceed. The jockey on the other already had his whip up. I gave Col the smallest of pulls to steady him in third place for the first of the three fences in the straight. This he jumped cleanly and was going equally well as we crossed the next, passing the jockey with his whip up before we reached the last.

Too much daylight, I thought. Col liked to jump the last fence with two or three other horses close ahead. He jumped it with a tremendous leap, though, and it was no problem after all to stoke up the will-win spirit and tell him that now . . . now . . . was the time.

Col put his leading foot to the ground, and it buckled under him, his nose going down to the grass. I leaned back and gripped fiercely with my legs, trying not to be thrown off. By some agile miracle his other foreleg struck the ground solidly, and with all his half-ton weight on that slender fetlock Col pushed himself upright and kept on going.

I gathered the reins. The race had to be lost, but the fire, so long arriving, couldn't easily be put out. Come on, now, you great brute, I was saying to him; now's the time, there is one to beat, get on with it, now show me, show everyone you can still do it.

As if he understood every word, he put his head forward and accelerated in the brief, astonishing last-minute spurt that had snatched victories before from seeming impossibilities.

We nearly made it, very nearly. Col ate up the lengths he'd lost, and I rode him almost as hard as I had Cascade, but without the fury. We were up with the other horse's rump, up with the saddle, up with the neck . . . and the winning post flashed back three strides too soon.

The princess had said she wouldn't come down to the unsaddling enclosure unless we won. Maynard Allardeck was there, however, staring at me as I slid to the ground, his face tight with hate. I went and weighed in with much of the afternoon's dissatisfaction drifting around like a cloud.

I rode the next race for the Lambourn trainer and finished third, a good way back. With a feeling of having accomplished nothing I changed into street clothes, done for the day, and went up to the princess's box.

The princess and Beatrice were standing at the balcony end of the box, talking to a tall, bulky man with light gray eyes and a bland face. Litsi, following my gaze, said, "Lord Vaughnley. He came to commiserate with Aunt Casilia over Col not winning. Do you know him? He's something in publishing, I think."

"He owns the *Towncrier* newspaper," I said.

Lord Vaughnley's attention had switched my way, and he reached over to shake my hand. "Kit," he said. "A great race. Such bad luck. Better luck in the Gold Cup, eh?"

"It would be nice."

"Anything I can do for you, my dear fellow?"

It was a question he asked whenever we met, as I had done him a few favors in the past. Usually I answered that there wasn't, but that day I thought there was no harm in trying a flier.

"Nothing, really," I said, "except . . . I suppose you've never come across the name of Henri Nanterre?"

Everyone in the box watched him while he pondered.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"My husband's business partner," the princess said. "Dear Lord Vaughnley, do you know of him?"

Lord Vaughnley slowly shook his head. "I can't recall ever . . ."

"Could you see if the *Towncrier* has a file on him?" I asked.

He nodded. "Write the name down for me," he said. "In caps."

I fished out a pen and small notepad and wrote both Nanterre's name and that of the construction company.

"He's French," I said. "Owns horses. He might be on the racing pages, or maybe business. Or even gossip."

"Anything you want specifically?" he said, smiling.

"He's over in England just now. Ideally, we'd like to know where he's staying."

Beatrice's mouth opened and closed again with a snap. She definitely knows how to reach him, I thought. Perhaps we could make use of that when we had a plan.

Lord Vaughnley said he would get the names run through the computer that very evening. He kissed the princess's hand and made general farewells, and to me he said as he was going, "Have you embarked on another crusade?"

"I guess so."

"Then heaven help this Nanterre."

"What did he mean by that?" Beatrice demanded as Lord Vaughnley departed, and the princess told her soothingly that it was a long story that wasn't to interfere with my telling her all about Col's race.

Beatrice, to do her justice, had been a great deal quieter since Nanterre's telephone call the evening before. She had refused to believe he had killed the horses until he had himself admitted it, and although she was still adamant that Roland should go along with Nanterre in business, she no longer praised him personally.

When it came time to go home, Beatrice again went with the princess in the Rolls. I had hoped Litsi would join them, as I was detouring to Chiswick to deliver Danielle to the studio, but he took her arm and steered her, chatting away, toward the jockeys' parking lot as if there had never been any question. Litsi had his aunt's knack of courteously and covertly getting his own way.

We dropped Danielle off (she waved to both of us and kissed neither), and I drove the two of us back to Eaton Square. I told Litsi I'd bought a recording telephone that morning. "When we get back, we'll rig it and work out a routine."

"Nanterre said he would ring again this evening."

"Mm," I said. "The phone I bought is also a conference phone. It has a loudspeaker, so that everyone in the room can hear what the caller's saying. You don't need the receiver. So when he rings, if it's you that answers, will you get him to speak in English?"

"Perhaps you'd better answer. Then he'd have to."

"All right. And the message we give is . . . no dice?"

"You couldn't just string him along?"

"Yeah, maybe," I said. "But to fix him we've got to find him, and he could be anywhere. Beatrice, I'm sure, knows where he is, or at least how to reach him. If we get him out in the open . . ." I paused. "What we ideally need is a tethered goat."

"And just who," Litsi inquired ironically, "are you electing for that dead-end job?"

I smiled. "A stuffed goat with a mechanical bleat. All real goats must be guarded or careful."

"Aunt Casilia, Roland and Danielle, guarded."

"And the horses," I said.

"Okay. And the horses guarded. And you and I . . ."

I nodded. "Careful."

Neither of us mentioned that Nanterre had specifically threatened each of us as his next targets; there was no point. I didn't think he would actually try to kill either of us, but the damage would have to be more than a pinprick to expect a result.

"What's he like?" Litsi asked. "I've never seen him."

"Well, I think he got into all this without thinking it out first. Last Friday I think he believed he had only to browbeat the princess heavily enough and Roland would collapse. That's also very nearly what happened."

"As I understand it, it didn't happen, because you were there."

"I don't know. Anyway, on Friday night, when he pulled out the gun that had no bullets . . . I think that may be typical of him. He acts on impulse, and he's used to getting his own way. Since his father died, he has run the company pretty well as he likes. When Roland rejected him by post, I'd guess he came over thinking, I'll soon change all that. I think in some ways he's childish, which doesn't make him less destructive; more so, probably."

I paused. "Attacking Danielle," I said, "he thought again that he would have it all his own way. I'll bet it never once occurred to him that she could run faster than he could. She wears running shoes to work. He turned up there in a city suit and polished leather shoes. It was a sort of arrogance, an assumption that he would naturally be faster, stronger, dominant."

"And the horses?" Litsi asked.

I hated to think of the horses. "They were vulnerable," I said. "I don't know where he would get a humane killer, but he does deal in guns. He carries one. They attract him; otherwise he wouldn't be wanting to make them."

Litsi nodded. "So what do you expect next from him?"

"Another half-baked attack on one of us. He won't have planned it properly, but we might find ourselves in nasty spots nevertheless. Don't go down dark alleys to meet strangers."

"I never do."

I asked him rather tentatively what he did do, back in Paris, where he lived.

"Frightfully little, I'm afraid," he said. "I have an interest in an art gallery. I spend a good deal of my life looking at paintings. The Renaissance expert Danielle and I went to listen to is a very old acquaintance. I was sure she would enjoy it. . . ."

"Yes."

He shifted in the passenger seat until he could see me better. "There was a group of us," he said. "We weren't alone."

"Yes, I know."

He didn't pursue it. He said unexpectedly instead, "I have been married, but we are separated. Technically, I am still married. If either my wife or I wished to remarry, there would be a divorce. But she has lovers, and I also . . ." He shrugged. "It's common enough in France."

I said, "Thank you," after a pause, and he nodded; and we didn't speak of it again.

When we got to Eaton Square, I suggested dropping him at the front door while I went to park the car, but he wouldn't hear of it. Dark alleys, he reminded me, and being careful.

"There's some light in the mews," I said.

"All the same, we'll park the car together and walk back together, and take our own advice."

"Okay," I said, and reflected that at one thirty, when I went to fetch Danielle, I would be going alone into the self-same dark alley, and it would be then that I'd better be careful.

Litsi and I let ourselves in. Dawson met us in the hall saying the princess and Beatrice had vanished to their rooms to change and rest. I went upstairs to fetch the new telephone.

On my way downstairs I met Sammy and took him with me to show him, as well as Dawson and Litsi, how the recording telephone worked.

The normal telephone arrangements in the house were both simple and complicated. There was only one line, but about a dozen scattered instruments. Incoming calls rang in only three of these: the one in the sitting room; the one in the office, where the secretary, Mrs. Jenkins, worked; and the one in the basement. Whoever was near one of those instruments when a call came in would answer and, if it was for someone else, reach that person via the intercom. This arrangement was to save six or more people from answering whenever the telephone rang. Outgoing calls could be made directly from any of the phones. The system normally worked smoothly.

I explained that to work the new telephone one had simply to unplug the ordinary instrument and plug in the new one.

"If you press that button," I said, "the whole conversation will be recorded. If you press that one, everyone in the room can hear what's being said."

I plugged the simple box of tricks into the sitting-room socket. "It had better be in here while we are all around. During the day, if everyone's out, like today, it can go to Mrs. Jenkins' office, and at night, if Dawson wouldn't mind, in the basement. It doesn't matter how many calls are unnecessarily recorded—we can scrub them out—but every time . . . if one could develop the habit?"

They all nodded. "It's a pity," Litsi said when Dawson and Sammy had gone, "that we can't somehow tap Beatrice's phone and record what she says."

"Anytime she's upstairs, like now, we can just lift the receiver and listen."

We lifted the receiver, but no one in the house was talking. Regretfully Litsi put the receiver down again, saying he would try every few minutes; but by the time Beatrice reappeared for dinner, the intermittent vigil had produced no results.

The princess came down to dinner, but not Roland, and on our return to the sitting room afterward, Litsi maneuvered everyone around, without seeming to, so that it was I who ended up sitting by the telephone.

Everyone waited. When the bell finally rang, Beatrice jumped.

I picked up the receiver, pressing both the recorder and conference buttons, and a voice spoke loudly in French.

Chapter 7

"SPEAK English, please," I said.

"I said," Nanterre said in English, "I wish to speak to Prince Litsi and he is to be brought to the telephone immediately."

"He isn't available," I said. "I can give him a message."

"I know who you are," he said. "You are the jockey. I left instructions for you to leave the house."

"I don't obey your instructions."

"You'll regret it."

"In what way?" I asked, but he wouldn't be drawn out.

"My notary will arrive tomorrow morning at ten," he said. "He will be shown to the sitting room, as before. Roland de Brescou and Princess Casilia will go there when he arrives. Also Prince Litsi and Danielle de Brescou. All will sign the form that is in the notary's briefcase. The notary will witness each signature and carry the document away. Is this understood?"

"It is understood," I said calmly, "but it's not going to happen. There's no document in the briefcase."

It stopped him barely a second. "My notary will bring a paper bearing the same form of words. Everyone will sign it."

"No. They aren't ready to," I said. "You can't make people behave against their consciences."

"Every conscience has its price," he said furiously, and instantly disconnected. I put the receiver down.

Litsi shook his head. "He's being cautious. Nothing he said could be presented to the police as a threat requiring action."

"You should sign his document," Beatrice said aggrievedly, "and be done with all this obstruction to expanding his business."

No one bothered to argue with her; the ground had been covered.

After the princess and Beatrice had gone to bed, Litsi and I drank a brandy nightcap in relaxation. I liked him more and more, and wished him permanently on the other side of the globe.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" he asked.

"Racing at Bradbury."

"Where's that?"

"Halfway to Devon."

"I don't know where you get the energy." He yawned. "I spent a gentle afternoon walking round Ascot, and I'm whacked."

In time we unplugged the recording telephone, carried it down to the basement, and replugged it in the hallway there. Then we went up to the ground floor, where Litsi gave me a sketchy wave and went into his room. I continued on up. I dozed on top of the bedclothes for an hour or so and then went down to get the car to fetch Danielle.

I thought, as I walked quietly into the dark, deserted alley, that it really was a perfect place for an ambush.

THE alley was a cobbled cul-de-sac about twenty feet wide and a hundred yards long, with a wider place at the far end for turning, the backs of tall buildings closing it all in like a canyon. Its sides were lined with garage doors, and unlike many other mews it had no residential entrances. By day the area was alive and busy, as a firm of motor mechanics occupied several of the garages. At night the place was a shadowy lane of big closed doors, lit only from the windows of the buildings above.

The garage where Thomas kept the Rolls was farther than halfway in. Beyond it was a garage now rented temporarily to the princess to accommodate Danielle's car. My Mercedes was parked outside Danielle's garage, and other cars, here and there along the mews, were similarly placed.

Around and behind these second cars there were myriad hiding places. The mews could shelter a host of monsters, and Beatrice knew what time I set off each night to Chiswick.

I walked down the center of the alley feeling my heart thud. The car looked exactly as I'd left it, but I checked the wiring under the hood and under the dashboard before switching on the ignition. I checked that there was no oil leaking from under the engine, that all the tires were hard, and I tested the brakes with a sudden stop before turning out onto the road.

Satisfied, I drove without trouble to Chiswick, collecting Danielle at two o'clock. She was tired from the long day and talked little, and in a short while we were back in the mews.

"You can't go on fetching me forever," she said as we walked around into Eaton Square.

"I like to."

"Litsi told me that the man in the hood was Henri Nanterre." She shivered. "I don't know if it makes it better or worse. Anyway, I'm not working Friday nights just now, or Saturdays or Sundays, of course. You can sleep Friday night."

We let ourselves into the house and said good night again on her landing. Her good-night kiss was again a defense, not a promise, and landed any way but squarely.

Give her time. Time was an aching anxiety with no certainty ahead.

BREAKFAST, warmth and newspapers were to be found each day down in the morning room, whose door was across the hall from Litsi's. I was in there about nine on that Thursday morning, drinking orange juice, when the intercom buzzed and Dawson's voice told me there was a call from Mr. Harlow.

I picked up the outside receiver fearfully. "Wykeham?"

"Oh, Kit. Look, I thought I'd better tell you, but don't alarm the princess. We had a prowler last night."

"Are the horses all right? Kinley?"

"Yes, yes. Nothing much happened. The guard said his dog was restless, as if someone was moving about. They patrolled the courtyards twice. They didn't see anyone, though, and after a while the dog relaxed again."

"What time was all this?"

"About midnight. I'd gone to bed, of course, and the guard didn't wake me, as nothing had happened. There's no sign that anyone was here."

"Just keep on with the patrols," I said. We discussed the two horses he would be sending to Bradbury that day, neither of them the princess's. It was a small country course, little more than a mile.

"Give Melissande a nice ride, now."

"Yes, Wykeham," I said. Melissande had been before my time. "Do you mean Pinkeye?"

"Well, of course." He cleared his throat and disconnected.

I put a slice of whole-meal bread into the toaster and thought about prowlers. Litsi came in and poured himself some coffee. "I thought," he said conversationally, assembling a bowl of Muesli and cream, "that I might go to the races today."

"To Bradbury?" I was surprised. "It's not like Ascot. It's the bare bones of the industry. Not much comfort."

"Are you saying you don't want to take me?"

"No. Just warning you."

He sat down at the table and watched me eat toast without butter or marmalade. "Your diet's disgusting."

"I'm used to it."

He shook his head resignedly and dug into his own hopelessly fattening concoction, and Danielle came in looking fresh and clear-eyed in a baggy white sweater. "Hi," she said to neither of us in particular. "What are you doing today?"

"Going to the races," Litsi said.

She looked at him in surprise. "With Kit?"

"Certainly, with Kit."

"Oh. Then, er, can I come?"

"In half an hour," I said, smiling.

So all three of us went to the races. Bradbury racecourse, we found when we arrived, was undergoing an ambitious upgrading. A whole new grandstand was going up inside scaffolding, and most of the top tier of the members' stand was being turned into a glassed-in viewing room, which would have tables, chairs and refreshments. There would also be a backward-facing viewing gallery, from which to see the horses walk around in the parade ring.

Litsi and Danielle went off in search of a drink and a sandwich in the old, unrefurbished bar, and I, sliding into nylon tights, breeches and boots, tried not to think about that too much. I pulled on a thin vest, and my valet neatly tied the white stock around my neck. After that I put on the padded back guard that saved one's spine and kidneys from too much damage, and on top of that the first set of colors for the day. Crash helmet, goggles, whip, number cloth, weight cloth, saddle—I checked them all, weighed out, and handed the necessary to Dusty to go and saddle up.

The horse I was riding won the race, which would surprise and please Wykeham but not make up for Col's losing the day before.

Besides Wykeham's two runners I'd been booked for three others. I rode one of those without results in the second race and put Pinkeye's colors on for the third, walking out in my warming parka to talk to the fussiest of all Wykeham's owners.

I didn't get far. As I walked toward the parade ring there was a cry high up and a voice calling, "Help." Along with everyone else I twisted around to see what was happening.

There was a man hanging by one hand from the new viewing balcony high on the members' stand. A big man in a dark overcoat. *Litsi.*

In absolute horror I watched him swing around until he had two hands on the top of the balcony wall, but he was too big and heavy to pull himself up, and below him was a fifty-foot drop to hard tarmac.

I sprinted over there, tore off my parka, and laid it on the ground directly under Litsi. "Take off your coat," I said to the nearest man. "Lay it on the ground."

"Someone must go up and help him," he said.

"Take off your coat." I turned to a woman. "Take off your coat. Lay it on the ground. Quick, quick, lay coats on the ground."

She looked at me blindly. She was wearing a full-length mink. She slid out of the coat and threw it on top of my parka, and said fiercely to the man next to her, "Take off your coat."

I ran from person to person. "Take off your coat, quick, quick. . . . Take off your coat."

A large crowd had collected, staring upward, arrested on their drift back to the stands for the next race. "Take off your coat," I could hear people saying. "Take off your coat."

Dear God, Litsi, I prayed, just hang on.

There were other people yelling to him, "Hang on, hang on," and one or two foolishly screaming. A little boy unzipped his blue parka and pulled off his jersey and flung them onto the growing pile, and I saw him running about the crowd, in his cotton T-shirt, his high voice calling, "Quick, quick, take off your coats."

It was working. The coats came off in dozens and were chucked higgledy-piggledy to form a mattress, until the circle on the ground was wide enough to contain Litsi if he fell, but could be thicker, thicker.

No one had reached him from the balcony side, no strong arms clutching to haul him up.

Coats were flying like leaves. The word had spread to everyone in sight. "Take off your coat, quick . . . quick. . . ."

When Litsi fell, he looked like another flying overcoat, except that he came down fast, like a plummet. One second he was hanging there, the next he was down. He fell straight to begin with; then his heavy shoulders tipped his balance backward, and he landed almost flat on his back.

He bounced heavily on the coats and rolled and slid and ended with his head on one coat and his body on the tarmac, sprawling on his side, limp as a rag.

I knelt beside him and saw immediately that although he was dazed, he was truly alive. Hands stretched to help him up, but I said, "Don't move him. Let him move first."

Everyone who went racing knew about spinal injuries and not moving jockeys until it was safe, and there I was, in my jockey's colors, to remind them.

I looked up at that crowd, all in shirt sleeves, all shivering with cold, all saints. Some were in tears, particularly the woman who'd laid her mink on the line.

"Litsi," I said. "Litsi, how are you doing?"

"I . . . Did I fall?" He moved a hand, and then his feet, just a little, and the crowd murmured with relief.

"Yes, you fell," I said. "Just stay there for a minute. Everything's fine."

Somebody above was calling down, "Is he all right?" and there, up on the balcony, were two men, who'd apparently gone up to save him.

The crowd shouted, "Yes," and started clapping, and in almost gala mood began collecting their coats from the pile. There must have been almost two hundred of them, I thought. Parkas, tweeds, raincoats, furs, even a horse rug. It was taking much longer to disentangle the heap than it had to collect it.

Someone had run to fetch the first-aid men, who arrived with a stretcher. Litsi, winded and disoriented, made no protest.

Danielle was suddenly there beside him, her face white.

"Litsi," she was saying. "Oh, God." She looked at me. "I was waiting for him. . . . Someone said a man fell. . . . Is he all right?"

"He's going to be," I said. "He'll be fine." I put my arms around her. "It's all right. Really it is. Nothing seems to be hurting him; he's just had his breath knocked out."

She slowly disengaged herself, and walked away beside the stretcher when they lifted it onto a gurney.

I picked up my parka. All the coats had been reclaimed, and it lay there alone on the tarmac, with my whip underneath. I looked up at the balcony, so far above, so deserted and unremarkable. Why had he been up there? How had he come to be clinging to life by his fingertips? In what way had he not been careful?

LITSI lay on a bed in the first-aid room until the races were over, but insisted then that he had entirely recovered and was ready to return to London.

He apologized to the racecourse executives for having been so foolish as to go up to the balcony to look at the new, much vaunted view and said that it was entirely his own clumsiness that had caused him to stumble over some builders' materials and lose his balance.

When asked his name, he'd given a shortened version of his surname without the "prince" in front, and said he hoped there wouldn't be too much public fuss over his stupidity.

He was sitting in the back of the car, telling us all this, Danielle beside him, as we started toward London. "How did you stumble?" I asked. "Was there a lot of junk up there?"

"Planks and things." He sounded puzzled. "I don't really know how I stumbled. I stood on something that rocked, and I put a hand out to steady myself, and it went out into space, over the wall. It happened so fast. I just lost my footing."

"Did anyone push you?" I asked.

"Kit!" Danielle said, horrified.

"I've been trying to remember exactly how it happened," he said slowly. "I didn't see anyone up there at all. I'm certain of that. I stood on something that rocked like a seesaw and totally lost my balance. I wouldn't say I was pushed."

"Well," I said thoughtfully, "do you mind if we go back there? I should have gone up for a look when I'd finished racing."

"The racecourse people went up," Litsi said. "They came and told me that there was nothing particularly dangerous but of course I shouldn't have gone."

"We'll go back," I said, and back we went.

Leaving Danielle and Litsi in the car, I walked through the gates and up the grandstand. It was a long haul to the top, and one could see why, with a stream of people piling up that way to the main tier to watch the race, those going up to rescue Litsi had been a fair time on their journey.

The upper tier could be reached by only one stairway. I went up it to the top landing, where the refreshment room was under construction. The whole area had been glassed in, leaving only the balcony open. Inside and out, there were copious piles of builders' materials, planks, drums of paint, and ladders.

I went gingerly forward to the open balcony and saw what had very likely happened. Planks lay side by side and several deep along the passage to the balcony, raising one, as one walked along them, higher than normal in proportion to the chest-high wall. When I was on the planks, the wall ahead seemed barely waist-high, and Litsi was taller than I by three or four inches.

Whatever had rocked under Litsi's feet was no longer rocking, but several planks by the balcony wall itself were scattered like spillikins, not lying flat as in the passage. I picked my way among them, feeling them move when I pushed, and reached the spot where Litsi had fallen.

With my feet firmly on the floor, I looked over. One could see the parade-ring area beautifully, with magnificent hills beyond. Very attractive, that balcony, and with one's feet on the floor, very safe. I walked back and descended to ground level.

"Well?" Litsi asked when I was back in the car. "What did you think?"

"Those planks looked pretty unsafe."

"Yes," he said ruefully as I drove out the racecourse gates. "I thought, after I'd overbalanced and managed somehow to catch hold of the wall, that if I just hung on, someone would come and rescue me, but you know, my fingers just gave way. . . ."

"I couldn't think where you'd got to," Danielle reflected. "I was waiting for you in the stands, where we'd arranged to meet after I'd been to the ladies' room. I didn't imagine . . ."

"But," said Litsi, "I went up to that balcony because I was supposed to meet you there, Danielle."

I stopped the car abruptly. "Say that again," I said.

Chapter 8

LITSI said it again. "I got this message that Danielle was waiting for me up on the balcony to look at the view."

"I didn't send any such message," Danielle said blankly. "I was waiting where we'd said we'd meet."

"Who gave you the message?" I asked Litsi.

"A man, an ordinary man. Not very young. He had a *Sporting Life* in his hands, and a sort of form book, and binoculars."

I let the brakes off with a sigh and started off again. Litsi had walked straight into a booby trap that had been meant either to frighten him or to kill him, and no one would have set it but Henri Nanterre. And the only way Nanterre could have known where Litsi would be was via Beatrice. I couldn't believe that she had known what use would be made of her little tidbit, and it occurred to me that I didn't want her to know, either. It was important that Beatrice should keep right on telling.

Litsi and Danielle were quiet in the back of the car, no doubt thinking along much the same lines. They protested, though, when I asked them not to tell Beatrice about the fake message.

"But she's got to know," Danielle said vehemently. "Then she'll stop it. She'll see how murderous that man is!"

"I don't want her to stop it yet," I said. "Not until Tuesday."

"Whyever not? Why Tuesday?"

"I don't see how we can catch Nanterre without her," I said. "So be a darling."

I wasn't sure whether it was the word darling that silenced her, but she made no more objections. I went back to thinking about the man who had delivered the fake message, and asked Litsi if he was positive the man had used the name Danielle.

"Positive," Litsi said without hesitation. "What he said to me first was, 'Do you know someone called Danielle?' When I said I did, he said she wanted me to go up the stairs to the balcony to look at the view. He pointed up there. So I went."

"Okay," I said. "Then we'll take a spot of positive action."

Like almost everyone in the racing world, I had a telephone in my car, and I put a call through to the *Towncrier* and asked for their racing correspondent, Bunty Ireland. "I want to pay for an advertisement," I told him. "But it has to be on the racing page and in a conspicuous place. In nice, big, noticeable letters."

"Fire away, then."

"Large reward offered to anyone who passed on a message from Danielle at Bradbury races on Thursday afternoon." I dictated it slowly and added the telephone number at Eaton Square.

Bunty's mystification came clearly across the airwaves. "You want the personal column for that," he said.

"No. The racing page. Did you get it straight?"

He read it over, word for word.

"Hey," he said, "if you were riding at Bradbury, perhaps you can confirm this very odd story we've got about a guy falling from a balcony onto a pile of coats. Is someone putting us on?"

"It happened," I said.

"Did you see it?"

"Yes. Look, Bunty, get the story from someone else, will you? I'm in my car, and I want to get that ad in the *Sporting Life* and the *Racing Post* before they go to press." I put the receiver down, then made the calls with the same request to the two sporting papers. "Tomorrow and Saturday," I said to them. "In big black type on the front page."

Danielle and Litsi had been listening in silence, and when I finished, Litsi said doubtfully, "Do you expect any results?"

"You never know. You can't get any results if you don't try."

We dropped Danielle at her studio in time for work and returned to Eaton Square. Litsi decided to say nothing at all about his narrow escape and asked for my advice on his strained muscles. "A sauna and a massage," I said. "Failing that, a long, hot soak and some aspirins. And John Grundy might give you a massage tomorrow morning."

When we reached the house, Litsi disappeared to deal with his woes in private. I continued up to the bamboo room, where, in the evening routine, I telephoned Wykeham, then picked up my messages from my answering machine at home.

Dinner was a stilted affair, with Roland de Brescou sitting at the head of the table in his wheelchair, looking abstracted.

Beatrice spent some time complaining that Harrods was now impossible—"Busloads of tourists, Casilia"—and that her favorite fur shop had vanished; then she looked at me and said with sudden venom, "I'm sure Roland would have agreed to Henri's plans if it hadn't been for you. You've influenced him. You're evil."

"Beatrice," the princess remonstrated, "Kit's our guest."

"I don't care," she said passionately. "He shouldn't be. It's he all the time who's standing in my way."

"In *your* way, Beatrice?" Roland asked.

Beatrice hesitated. "In my room," she said finally.

"It's true," I said without aggression, "that I'm against Monsieur de Brescou signing anything against his conscience."

"I'll get rid of you," she said.

"No, Beatrice, really, that's too much," the princess exclaimed. "Kit, please accept my apologies."

"It's all right," I assured her truthfully. "Perfectly all right. I do stand in Mrs. Bunt's way in the matter of Monsieur acting against his conscience. I always will."

Litsi looked at me speculatively. I had made a very explicit and provocative declaration, and he seemed to be wondering if I was aware of it. I, on the other hand, was glad to have been presented with the opportunity.

"You are after Danielle's money," Beatrice said furiously.

"You know she has none."

"After her inheritance from Roland."

The princess and Roland were looking poleaxed. No one, I guessed, had conducted such open warfare before at that polite dinner table. "On the contrary," I said civilly. "If selling guns would make Monsieur richer, and if I were after Danielle's mythical inheritance, then I would be urging him to sign at once."

She stared at me, temporarily silenced. I kept my face entirely noncommittal, a habit learned from dealing with Maynard Allardeck, and behaved as if we had been having a normal conversation. "In general," I said pleasantly, "I would implacably oppose anyone trying to get his way by threats and harassment. Henri Nanterre has behaved like a thug, and while I'm here I'll try my hardest to ensure he fails in his objective."

"Well," Beatrice said. "Well . . ."

I said mildly, as before, "It's really as well to make oneself perfectly clear, isn't it? As you have admirably done, Mrs. Bunt?"

We were eating Dover sole at the time. Beatrice decided there were a good many bones all of a sudden demanding her attention, and Litsi and the princess batted a few platitudes across the table to flatten out the Bunt-Fielding ripples. When we moved to the sitting room, Litsi again made sure I was next to the telephone, but it remained silent all evening. No messages, threats or boasting from Nanterre.

When Roland, the princess and Beatrice finally went to bed, Litsi, rising to his feet to follow them, said, "You elected yourself as goat, then?"

"I don't intend to get eaten," I said, smiling.

I did the rounds of the house, and in due time I went to fetch Danielle at Chiswick. Before I left I took even more precautions with the guts of the car, but again everything appeared safe.

Danielle looked pale and tired. "A hectic evening," she said. Her job as bureau coordinator involved deciding how individual news stories should be covered and dispatching camera crews accordingly. I'd been in the studio with her several times and seen the mental energy and drive that went into her success there. I'd seen her decisiveness and her inspirational sparkle, and I knew that afterward they could die away fast into weary silence.

The silences between us, though, were no longer companionable, but almost embarrassments, as between strangers. We had been passionate lovers through November, December and January, but now, in her, the joy seemed to have evaporated.

I drove back to Eaton Square thinking how very much I loved her, how much I longed for her to be as she had been, and when I stopped the car in the mews, I said impulsively, before she could get out, "Danielle, please . . . please . . . tell me what's wrong."

As soon as I'd said it, I wished I hadn't, because the last thing on earth I wanted to hear was that she loved Litsi. In a panic I said, "Don't answer. It doesn't matter. Don't answer."

She turned her head and looked at me, and then looked away. "It was wonderful, at the beginning, wasn't it?" she said. "It happened so fast. It was . . . magic."

I couldn't listen. I opened the car door and started to get out.

"Wait," she said. "I must—now that I've started."

"No," I said. "Don't."

"About a month ago," she went on, all the repressed things pouring out in a jumble, "when you had that dreadful fall at Kempton and I saw you lying on a stretcher unconscious, I was so frightened you would die . . . and I was overwhelmed by how much danger there is in your life, and how much pain. And I saw myself here, in a strange country, with a commitment made for my whole life . . . not just enjoying a delicious, unexpected romance, but trapped forever into a life far from home, full of fear every day. And then Litsi came . . . and it seemed so simple being with him, going to safe things like art lectures and not hearing my heart thud. . . . I could hear the worry in your voice on the telephone and see it this week in your face, but I couldn't seem to tell you." She paused. "I asked Aunt Casilia what to do."

"What did she say?"

"She said no one could decide for me." She swallowed. "She said that nothing would change you, that you are as you are and I should see you clearly. She said the question wasn't whether I could face life here with you, but whether I could face life anywhere without you."

She paused again. "I told her how calm I felt with Litsi. She said Litsi was a nice man. She said in time I would see . . . what I wanted most. But I can't go on like this forever. I know it's unfair to you. I went to the races yesterday and today to see if I could go back, but I can't. I hardly watch them. I just talk to Litsi. . . ."

"I love you very much," I said slowly. "Do you want me to give up my job?"

"Aunt Casilia said if I asked it, and you did, and we married, it would be disastrous; we would be divorced within five years. She said I wasn't to ask it. I would be destroying you, because I hadn't your courage." Tears filled her eyes.

I looked along the shadowy mews and thought of danger and fear, those old, tamed friends. One couldn't teach anyone how to live with them; it had to come from inside. It got easier with practice, like everything else, but also it could vanish overnight.

"Come on," I said. "It's getting cold." I paused. "Thank you for telling me."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go indoors and sleep till morning."

"No," she sobbed on a laugh. "About what I said."

"I'm going to wait, like Princess Casilia told me to."

"Told you!" Danielle exclaimed. "Did you tell her?"

"No, I didn't. She said it out of the blue at Ascot."

"Oh," Danielle said in a small voice.

We got out of the car. What Danielle had said had been bad enough, but not as bad as an irrevocable declaration for Litsi. Until she took off the engagement ring she still wore, I would cling to some sort of hope.

We walked back side by side to the square, and said good night again briefly on the landing. I went on upstairs and lay on the bed and suffered a good deal, for which there was no aspirin.

When I went in to breakfast, both Litsi and Danielle were already in the morning room, he at the table reading the *Sporting Life*. "Is the advertisement in?" I said.

"Yes, it's in. And there's a picture of you in the paper."

I fetched some grapefruit juice, unexcited. There were photographs of me in newspapers quite often—a result of the job.

"It says here," Litsi said, "that champion jockey Kit Fielding saved the life of a man at Bradbury by persuading the crowd to take off their coats." He lowered the paper and stared at me. "You didn't say a word about it being your idea."

Danielle too was staring. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"An uprush of modesty," I said, drinking the juice.

Litsi laughed. "I won't thank you, then."

"No, don't."

Danielle said to me, "Do you want some toast?"

"Yes, please."

She cut a slice of whole-meal bread and put it in the toaster. The toast popped up, and she put it on a plate and brought it over to me.

"Thank you," I said.

"You're welcome." It was lightly said, but not a return to November. I ate the toast and was grateful for small mercies.

"Are you busy again this afternoon?" Litsi asked.

"Five rides," I said. "Are you coming to Sandown?"

"Aunt Casilia said we're all going."

"All right." I reflected a little. "It might be a good idea," I said to Danielle, "if you could casually mention in front of Beatrice that you'll be working only on Monday next week."

She looked astonished. "But I'm working a normal schedule."

"I want Beatrice to think Monday's your last night for coming home so late. There's no harm in laying out a line with a few baited hooks. If the fish doesn't take the opportunity, nothing will have been lost."

"What sort of line and hooks?"

"A time and a place for removing an immovable object."

"Do you know what he means?" Danielle asked Litsi.

"I'm afraid I do," he said. "He told Beatrice last night that while he was here to prevent it Roland would never sign a contract for arms. Kit is also the only one of us that Nanterre hasn't attacked. Kit's directing him to a time and place that we may be able to turn to our advantage. The time, I gather, is early Tuesday morning, when he leaves this house to fetch you from work."

"And the place?" Danielle said, her eyes wide.

Litsi glanced at me. "We all know the perfect place," he said.

After the briefest of pauses Danielle said flatly, "The alley."

I nodded. "When Thomas drives the princess and Beatrice to the races today, he'll say he's forgotten something from the garage. He's going to drive the Rolls right down the mews to the turning circle, saying how dark and deserted it is at night. Then he'll stop by the garage, behind my Mercedes, and point out that it is my car and that I fetch you in it every night. If Beatrice does her stuff, there's just a chance Nanterre will come. And if he doesn't, as I said, nothing's lost. I'll hire a chauffeur-driven car to go to Chiswick to bring you back," I added.

"Couldn't Thomas . . . ?"

"Thomas says he wouldn't miss the show for anything. He and Sammy will be there. I'm not walking into that alley on my own."

"I won't be able to work," Danielle said. "What if he comes? What if you catch him, what then?"

"I'll make him an offer he can't resist," I said, and although they both wanted to know what it was, I thought I wouldn't tell them just yet.

Chapter 9

We all went to Sandown races, except, of course, for Roland, still in the care of Sammy. Litsi, Danielle and I delayed leaving the house until after Thomas had driven away with the princess and Beatrice. Thomas, closing Beatrice into the back seat, had given me a large wink before settling himself behind the wheel. I alarmed Litsi and Danielle by checking my car again for traps, but I found no explosive, sticky strangers.

"Do you do this every time you go out?" Litsi asked.

"Every time, just now."

When we reached Sandown, they went off to lunch and I to work. Litsi might have been lucky enough to dodge the publicity, but too many papers had spelled my name right. So many strangers shook my hand that I found the whole afternoon embarrassing.

The one person who was predictably upset by this climate of approval was Maynard Allardeck, who seemed to be dogging my footsteps, presumably hoping to catch me in some infringement of the rules. Although not one of the stewards officially acting at that meeting, he was standing in the parade ring before each race, watching everything I did, his eyes hostile and intent.

When I went out there for the third of my rides, on her runner Abseil, the princess at once remarked on Maynard's presence at a distance of no more than a few yards. "Mr. Allardeck," she said as I joined her, Litsi, Danielle and Beatrice, "is staring at you."

"Yes, I know."

"Who is Mr. Allardeck?" Beatrice demanded.

"Kit's sister's husband's father," Danielle answered succinctly.

"It's unnerving," Litsi said.

I nodded. "I think it's supposed to be."

"If looks could kill, you'd be in your grave," Danielle said.

The princess decided on a frontal approach. As if spotting Maynard for the first time, she raised gloved hands in greeting and said, "Ah, Mr. Allardeck, such a splendid day, isn't it?" and walked three or four paces toward him.

He removed his hat and bowed, and said that yes, it was. The signal was given for jockeys to mount, and with a sweet smile the princess wished Maynard good fortune for the afternoon, and came to say, before I went over to Abseil, "Come back safe."

"Yes, Princess," I said.

Her eyes flicked momentarily in the direction of Danielle, and I suddenly understood her inner thought: Come back safe because your young woman will be lost forever if you don't.

"Do your best," the princess said quietly, as if negating her first instruction, and I nodded and cantered Abseil to the start thinking that certainly I could ride around conscious chiefly of safety, and certainly to some extent I'd been doing it all week, but if I intended to do it forever, I might as well retire at once. Caution and winning were incompatible. A too careful jockey would lose his reputation, his owners, his career and, in my case, anyway, his self-respect. The stark choice between Danielle and my job, unresolved all night, had sat on my shoulder already that afternoon through two undemanding hurdle races. I had, in fact, been acutely aware of her being there in the stands, in a way I hadn't been when I hadn't known of her turmoil of fears.

Abseil, a gray eight-year-old steeplechaser, was a fluid, agile jumper with reasonable speed and questionable stamina. He could produce no acceleration in a crisis. His one advantage was his boldness over fences. Sandown racecourse, undulating, with seven fences close together down the far side, was a good place for him, except that the uphill finish could find him out. To win there, he had to be flying in the lead coming around the last long bend and jump the last three fences at his fastest speed. Then, if he faded on the hill, one might just hang on in front as far as the post.

Abseil himself was unmistakably keen to race. "Jumping out of his skin," Wykeham would have said. There were eight runners that day, and Abseil was second favorite. We set off in a bunch at no great pace, because no one wanted to make the running, and I had no trouble at all being careful over the first three fences, also around the long bottom bend, over the three fences that would be the last three next time around, and uphill past the stands.

It was when we turned right at the top of the hill to go out on the second circuit that the decision was immediately there, staring me in the face. To go at racing pace over the next fence—with its downhill landing, graveyard of many a hope—or to check, rein back, jump it carefully, lose maybe four lengths.

Abseil wanted to go. I kicked him. We flew the fence, passing two horses in midair, landing on the downhill slope with precision and skimming speed, going around the bend into the back straight in second place.

The seven fences along there were like staggered traffic lights. If one met the first right, one met them all right. Abseil took a hint, shortened one stride, galloped happily on, and soared over the first of the seven fences with perfection.

The decision had been made almost unconsciously. I couldn't do anything else. What I was, what I could do, lay there in front of me, and even for Danielle I couldn't deny it.

Abseil took the lead from the favorite at the second of the seven fences, and I sent him mental messages: Go for it, pull the stops out, this is the way it is, and you're going to get your chance, I am as I am and I can't help it, this is living. Get on and fly.

He flew the open ditch and then the water jump. He sailed over the last three fences on the far side. He was in front by a good thirty yards all the way around the last bend.

Three more fences. He had his ears pricked, enjoying himself. Caution had long lost the battle, in his mind as in mine. He went over the first fence at full racing pace, and over the second, and over the last of all with me almost lying on his neck to keep up with him, weight forward, head near his head.

He tired very fast on the hill, as I'd feared he would. I could feel him begin to waver and tell me he'd gone far enough.

Come on, hang on to it, I told him. We've almost done it, just keep on going, we're not losing it now, we're so near.

I could hear the crowd yelling, which one usually couldn't. I could hear another horse coming behind me, hoofs thudding. And the winning post came just in time for me that time, not three strides too late.

Abseil was proud of himself, as he deserved to be. I patted his neck and told him he was okay, he'd done a good job, he was a truly great fellow, and he trotted back toward the unsaddling enclosure with his ears still pricked and his fetlocks springy.

The princess was flushed and pleased. I slid to the ground, smiled at her, and began to unbuckle the girths. Abseil was practically bowing to the crowd, knowing the applause had been his. I patted his neck again, thanking him. He tossed his gray head, turning to look at me with both eyes, blowing down his nostrils, nodding again.

"They talk to you," the princess said.

"Some of them."

I looped the girths around my saddle and turned to go to weigh in, and found Maynard Allardeck standing directly in my path. I stopped. I never liked speaking to him, because anything I said gave him offense. One of us was going to have to give way, and it was going to be me, because in any sort of confrontation between a steward and a jockey, the jockey would lose.

"Why, Mr. Allardeck," said the princess, stepping to my side, "are you congratulating me? Wasn't that a delightful win?"

Maynard took off his hat as I sidestepped politely and headed for the weighing room. She was a great lady, I thought gratefully, sitting on the scales. She understood what was going on.

Maynard troubled me, though, because it had looked very much as if he were trying to force me into jostling him, and I was going to have to be extremely careful to avoid physical contact. The film I'd made of him was only an ultimate defense. If I used it, Maynard's life would be in tatters, but his full fury would be unleashed. He would have nothing more to lose, and we would all be in real peril, Bobby and Holly as well as me.

Meanwhile, there were more races to ride. I went twice more from start to finish without caution and, the gods being kind, also without hitting the turf. I changed into street clothes and went up to the princess's box, and found Lord Vaughnley there with her and Litsi and Danielle; no sign of Beatrice.

"My dear chap," Lord Vaughnley said, his large, bland face full of kindness, "I came to congratulate Princess Casilia. Well done, well done, my dear fellow. A nice tactical race. And yesterday too. That was splendid, absolutely first class."

"I didn't have any runners yesterday," the princess said.

"No, no, not a winner. Saving that fellow's life, don't you know, at Bradbury races."

"What fellow?" the princess asked.

"Some fool who went where he shouldn't and fell off a balcony.

Didn't Kit tell you? No," he considered, "I suppose he wouldn't." Obligingly he gave her an account of the proceedings while Litsi and Danielle looked studiously out the windows. Eventually he ran out of superlatives.

"By the way," he said to me, picking up a large brown envelope that lay on the tea table, "this is for you. All we could find. Hope it will be of some help."

"Thank you very much," I said, taking the envelope.

"Right," said Lord Vaughnley, beaming, and went away in clouds of benevolence, leaving the princess wide-eyed.

"You were at Bradbury," the princess said to Danielle and Litsi. "Did you see all this?"

"No," Danielle said, "we didn't. We read about it this morning in the *Sporting Life*."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Kit didn't want a fuss."

The princess looked at me. "That's true," I said, "I didn't. And I'd be awfully grateful, Princess, if you didn't tell Mrs. Bunt."

She had no chance to ask me why not, as Beatrice reappeared as if on cue, coming into the box with a smug expression that visibly deepened when she saw I was there. The princess told her it was time to leave, the last race being long over, and shepherded her off to the Rolls. There was no chance of Litsi's going with them, as Danielle clung firmly to his arm all the way to the parking lot; she didn't want to be alone with me after her explanations in the night.

When we reached the car, Litsi sat in the front, at Danielle's insistence, and she sat in the rear. Before starting the car I opened Lord Vaughnley's envelope. Inside, there was a small clipping from a newspaper, a larger piece from a magazine, a black-and-white eight-by-ten photograph, and a compliments slip from Lord Vaughnley, asking me to return the pieces to the *Towncrier*.

"What is it?" Litsi said.

I passed him the black-and-white photograph, which was of a prize-giving ceremony after a race. "The man receiving the trophy is Henri Nanterre," I said.

"So that's what he looks like," Litsi said thoughtfully. "Once seen, easily remembered." He passed the photograph to Danielle. "What other goodies do you have?"

"This magazine piece seems to be a Derby preview from last year. Nanterre apparently had a part interest in one of the runners." The newspaper clipping was no more helpful. Prudhomme, owned by French industrialist H. Nanterre, had come to run at Newmarket. I put everything back into the envelope. We were no further forward.

I drove us to London, where we found that nothing of interest had happened, with the result that Sammy was getting bored.

"Just by being here," I said, "you earn your bread." I showed him the *Towncrier*'s photograph. "That man, there," I said, pointing. "If ever you see him, that's when you take care. He carries a gun, and he's full of all sorts of tricks."

He looked at the photograph. "I'll know him," he said.

I took Lord Vaughnley's offerings up to the bamboo room, telephoned Wykeham, picked up my messages: the usual routine. Then I went down to the sitting room for a drink before dinner, and the evening passed more easily than some of the others. But there was still no one telephoning in response to the advertisements, and there was again no sound from Nanterre.

Early the next morning, well before seven, Dawson woke me with the intercom, saying there was a call from Wykeham Harlow.

I picked up the receiver, sleep forgotten.

"K-K-Kit." He was stuttering dreadfully. "C-come down here. C-come at once."

WITH appalling foreboding I flung on some clothes, sprinted around to the car, did very cursory checks on it, and drove fast through the almost empty streets toward Sussex.

Wykeham was standing in the parking area with Robin Curtiss, the vet, when I drove in.

"What's happened?" I said, getting out of the car.

"C-come and look."

I followed Wykeham into the courtyard next to the one that had held Cascade and Cotopaxi. He went across to one of the closed doors. "In there," he said, his voice filled with anger.

The box door was closed, but not bolted. Not bolted, because the horse inside wasn't going to escape.

I pulled the door open and saw the body lying on the peat.

Bright chestnut, three white socks, white blaze. It was Col.

Speechlessly I turned to Wykeham, feeling all of his rage and a lot of private despair. Nanterre was too quick on his feet, and it wouldn't take much more for Roland de Brescou to crumble.

"It's the same as before," Robin said. "The bolt." He bent down, lifted the chestnut forelock, showed me the mark on the white blaze. "There's a lot of oil in the wound. The gun's been oiled since last time." He straightened. "The horse is stone cold. It was done early, I should say before midnight."

Col . . . gallant at Ascot, getting ready for Cheltenham, for the Gold Cup.

"Where was the guard?" I said, at last finding my voice.

"He was here," Wykeham said. "In the stable, I mean, not in the courtyard. I've told him to wait for you in the kitchen."

"Col," I said, "is the only one, isn't he? You did check Kinley, didn't you?"

"Yes, straightaway. He's in the corner box still, in the next courtyard."

"The insurers aren't going to like this," Robin said, looking down at the dead horse. "With the first two, it might have been just bad luck that they were two good ones, but three . . ."

"How did he know where to find them?" I said, as much to myself as to Robin and Wykeham. "Is this Col's usual box?"

"Yes," Wykeham said. "I suppose now I'll have to change them all around, but it does disrupt the stable."

I put a hand down to touch Col's foreleg and felt its rigidity, its chill. The foreleg that had saved us from disaster at Ascot, that had borne all his weight. "I'll tell the princess," I said. "We'll be at Sandown again today."

Wykeham nodded vaguely. "What are we running?" he said.

"Helikon for the princess, and three others."

"Dusty has the list, of course." He took a long look again at the dead splendor on the peat. "I'd kill the pig who did that," he said, "with his own damned bolt."

We all made our way to Wykeham's house, where Robin went off to telephone in the office. The guard was still in the kitchen, with his dog, a black Doberman, lying at his feet.

"Tell Kit Fielding what you told me," Wykeham said.

The guard was middle-aged and running to fat. His voice was defensively belligerent. "I couldn't help it, could I?" he said. "Not with those bombs going off."

"Bombs? What bombs?" I asked.

The man groomed his mustache with thumb and forefinger, working outward from the nose. "Well, how was I to know they wasn't proper bombs?" he said. "They made enough noise."

"Just start," I said, "at the beginning. When you came on duty."

"Yes," he said. "I come on duty sevenish, when the head lad's finished the feeding. I make a base here in the kitchen and do a turn every half hour. Standard procedure—go into all the courtyards, look in the hay barn, tack room, feed shed, round the back where the tractor is, and the harrow, muckheap, the lot."

"Go on, then," I said. "How many turns had you done when the bombs went off?"

He worked it out on his fingers. "Nine, say. Everything was quiet. So I comes back here for a bit of a warm, and goes out again half eleven, I should say. I start on the rounds, and there's this almighty bang and crashing round the back. So I went off there with Ranger." He looked down at his dog.

"Yes," I said. "Where, exactly, round the back?"

"The first one was round the back of the muckheap. I found what was left of it with my torch afterward. Then a second one went off not ten feet away. Under the harrow."

Wykeham, like many trainers, used the harrow occasionally for raking his paddocks, keeping them in good shape.

"Did it blow up the harrow?" I said, frowning.

"No. See, they weren't that sort of bomb. It went off with a huge shower of sparks. Some of them fell on me. They were fireworks. I found the empty boxes. They said 'bomb' on them, where they weren't burned."

"Where are they now?" I asked.

"Where they went off. I didn't touch them, except to kick them over to read what was on the side."

"So what was your dog doing all this time?"

"I had him on the leash. He didn't like the bangs or the sparks. He's supposed to be trained to ignore gunshots, but he didn't like the fireworks. He was barking fit to bust and trying to run off."

"Maybe he was trying to run after the man who shot the horse."

The guard's mouth opened and snapped shut. "Ranger was barking at the bombs," he said aggressively.

I nodded. It was too late for it to matter.

"And I suppose," I said, "that you didn't hear any other bangs in the distance. You didn't hear the shot?"

"No. My ears were ringing, and Ranger was kicking up a racket."

"What did you do next?"

"Nothing," he said. "I thought it was some of those lads who work here. Proper little monkeys. So I just went on with the patrols, regular like."

I sighed. "You were here Wednesday, when we had the prowler?"

"Yes, I was. Ranger was whining, but I couldn't find anyone."

Nanterre, I thought, had come to the stable Wednesday night, intending to kill, and had been thwarted by the dog; and he'd come back two nights later with his diversions. He must have been at Ascot and learned what Col looked like. I hadn't seen him, but among large crowds on racecourses that wasn't extraordinary.

"Over the weekend," I said to Wykeham, "we'll have double and treble patrols. Constant. Have you told the police yet?"

"Not yet. Soon, though." He looked with disgust at the guard. "They'll want to hear what you've said."

The guard, however, stood up. If the police wanted him, they could telephone his firm, he said. He was going home to bed.

Wykeham morosely watched him go and said, "What's going on, Kit? The princess knows who killed them all, and so do you. So tell me."

It wasn't fair, I thought, for him not to know, so I told him the outline: a man was trying to extract a signature from Roland de Brescou by attacking his family wherever he could.

"But that's terrorism!"

"In a small way," I said.

"Small? Do you call three dead great horses small?"

I didn't. It made me sick to think of them. It was small on a world scale of terrorism, but rooted in the same wicked conviction that the path to attaining one's end lay in slaughtering the innocent.

"Show me where all the princess's horses are," I suggested, and together we went out again into the courtyards. About a third of the stable's inmates were out at exercise on the Downs, and while we were leaving Kinley's yard they came clattering back, filling the whole place with noise and movement. Wykeham and I sorted our way around as the lads led their horses into the boxes, brushed them down, tidied the bedding, bolted the doors, and went off to their breakfasts.

I saw all the old friends in their quarters, among them young Helikon, the four-year-old hurdler going to Sandown that afternoon. In the last courtyard, next to the empty box where Kinley was usually kept, we came to Abseil. He put his head out his door inquiringly. I rubbed his gray nose and upper lip with my hand and put my head next to his and breathed out gently like a reversed sniff into his nostril. He rubbed his nose a couple of times against my cheek and then lifted his head away, the greeting done. Wykeham paid no attention. He talked to horses that way himself, when they were that sort of horse. With some, one would never do it; one could get one's nose bitten off.

We went back into the house, where Wykeham telephoned the police and received a promise of attention and I got through to Dawson, asking him to tell the princess I was at Wykeham's and would go to Sandown from there.

Wykeham and I had breakfast and drove to the Downs in his big-wheeled pickup to see the second lot exercise, and under the wide, cold, windy sky he surprised me by saying, apropos of nothing special, that he was thinking of taking on an assistant. "I'm getting old," he said. "It'll have to be someone the princess likes. Someone you get on with too. So if you think of anyone, let me know. I don't know who's around so much these days."

"All right," I said, but with misgivings. "You're not going to retire, are you?"

"No, I'm not. Never. I wouldn't mind dying up here, watching my horses." He laughed suddenly, in his eyes a flash of the vigor that had always been there not so long ago, when he'd been a titan. "I've had a great life, you know. One of the best."

"Stick around," I said.

He nodded. "Maybe next year," he said, "we'll win the Grand National."

WYKEHAM'S FOUR RUNNERS AT Sandown were in the first three races and the fifth. I didn't see the princess until she came down to the parade ring for Helikon's race, which was the third. Beatrice and Litsi were with her, and also Danielle, who after the faintest of greetings was busy blanking me out, it seemed, by looking carefully at the circling horses.

"Good morning," the princess said to me. "Dawson said Wykeham telephoned early again." There was a shade of apprehension in her face, which deepened at what she read in my own. She walked a little away from her family, and I followed.

"Again?" she said, not wanting to believe it. "Which ones?"

"One," I said. "Col."

She absorbed the shock with a long blink. "The same way as before?"

"Yes. With the bolt."

"My poor horse."

"I'm so sorry."

"I will not tell my husband," she said.

"It will be in the newspapers tomorrow or on Monday," I said. "Probably worse than before."

"Oh. . . ." The prospect affected her almost as much as Col's death. "I will not add to the pressure on my husband," she said fiercely. "He cannot sign this wretched contract. He will die if he does. He will not survive the disgrace in his own mind. He will wish to die—as all these years, although his condition is such a trial to him, he has wished to live." She made a small gesture with her gloved hand. "He is . . . very dear to me, Kit."

To save his honor, to save his life, to save their life together. Good Lord, what a burden. She needed Superman, not me.

"Don't tell him about Col," she said again.

"No, I won't."

She nodded slightly and turned her attention to Helikon, who happened to be passing. "What do you think?" she said, her defense mechanism switching on smoothly. "What shall I expect?"

"He's still a bit hotheaded," I said, "but if I can settle him, he should run well."

"Well, do your best."

I said as usual that I would. The time came to mount, and hotheaded Helikon and I went out onto the track. He was nervous as well as impetuous, not a joy to ride. There were twenty or more runners, and Helikon and I set off near the front because if he was bumped in the pack, he'd be frightened into stopping; yet I also had to keep a tight hold, as he could take charge and decamp.

He went through the routine of head tossing against the restraint, but I had him anchored and running fairly well, and by the third flight of hurdles I thought the worst was over. We could now settle a little and design a passable race.

It wasn't his day. At the fourth flight the horse just ahead of us put his foot through the obstacle and went down with a crash, slithering along the ground on his side. Helikon fell over him, going down fast, pitching me off. I didn't actually see the subsequent course of events all that clearly, though it was a pileup worthy of a fog on a motorway. Five horses, I found afterward, hit the deck at that jump. One of them seemed to land smack on top of me—not frightfully good for one's health.

Chapter 10

I LAY on the grass, assessing things.

I was conscious and felt like a squashed beetle, but I hadn't broken my legs, which I always feared most.

One of the other jockeys from the melee squatted beside me and asked if I was all right, but I couldn't answer him, on account of having no breath. He unbuckled my helmet and pushed it off, for which I couldn't thank him.

Breath came back, as it does. By the time the ambulance arrived, along with a doctor in a car, I'd come to the welcome conclusion that nothing at all was broken and that it was time to stand up and get on with things. Standing, I felt hammered and sore in several places, but one had to accept that.

One of the other jockeys hadn't been so fortunate and was flat out, white and silent, with the first-aid men kneeling anxiously beside him. He woke up slightly during the ambulance ride back to the stands and began groaning intermittently, which at least showed signs of life.

When we reached the first-aid room, I climbed out of the ambulance first, and found the other jockey's wife waiting there, pregnant and pretty, screwed up with anxiety.

"Is Joe all right?" she said to me, and then saw him coming out on the stretcher, very far from all right. I saw the deep shock in her face, the quick pallor, the agony.

That was what had happened to Danielle, I thought. That was much what she'd seen, and that was what she'd felt. I put my arm around Joe's wife and held her close and told her Joe would be fine, he would be fine; and neither of us knew if he would.

He was carried into the first-aid room. Presently the doctor came out and said they would be sending him to the hospital as soon as an outside ambulance arrived.

"You can come in and sit with him, if you like," he told Joe's wife, and to me added, "You'd better come in too, hadn't you?"

I went in, and he checked me over and said, "What aren't you telling me?"

"Nothing."

"I know you," he said. "And everywhere I touch you, you stifle a wince."

"Ouch, then," I said.

"Where is ouch?"

"Ankle, mostly."

He pulled my boot off, and I said, "Ouch," quite loudly, but as I'd believed, there were no cracked bits. He said to get some strapping and some rest and added that I could ride on Monday, if I could walk and if I was crazy enough.

He went back to tending Joe, and one of the nurses came to tell me I was wanted outside. I found Litsi and Danielle there, waiting. Litsi had his arm around Danielle's waist.

I was aware of my disheveled state, of the limp I couldn't help, of the grass stains and the tear in my breeches down my left thigh. Litsi took it all in. "Aunt Casilia sent us to see how you were."

It had taken a great deal of courage, I thought, for Danielle to be there. I said to Litsi, but with my eyes on Danielle, "Please tell her I'm all right; I'll be riding on Monday."

"How can you ride?" Danielle said intensely.

"Sit in the saddle, put the feet in the stirrups, pick up the reins."

"Don't be stupid. How can you joke . . . ? And don't answer that.

I know both the answers. Easily or with difficulty, whichever is funnier."

She suddenly couldn't help laughing, but it was partly hysterical, and it was against Litsi's big shoulder she smothered her face.

"I'll come up to the box," I said to him, and he nodded, but just then the first-aid-room door opened and Joe's wife came out.

"Kit," she said, "I've got to go to the ladies' room. They say I can go to the hospital with Joe, but they may come while I'm gone. Will you wait here and tell them? Don't let him go without me."

"I'll see to it," I said.

She said, "Thanks," faintly, and ran. Danielle, her eyes wide, said, "But that's just like me. Is her husband hurt badly?"

"It's too soon to tell, I think."

"How can she stand it?"

"I don't know," I said. "I really don't know. It's much simpler from Joe's side . . . and mine."

"I'll go and see if she needs help," Danielle said abruptly, and set off after Joe's wife.

As Litsi and I stood waiting for the ambulance Dusty arrived in a rush, his eyes searching, suspicious.

"I've wrenched my ankle," I said. "You'll have to get Jamie Fingall for the fifth race, but I'm cleared for Monday. Is Helikon all right?"

He nodded briskly a few times and left, wasting no words.

Litsi, in the sober suiting of civilization, looked at the marks of the earth on the princess's colors, looked at my torn, green-stained breeches and at the leg I was putting no weight on. "How do you face it over and over again?" he said.

I laughed. "I never expect it, for a start. It's always an unpleasant surprise."

"And now that it's happened, how do you deal with it?"

"Think about something else," I said. "Take a lot of aspirins and concentrate on getting back as soon as possible. I don't like other jockeys loose on my horses, like now. I want to be on them. When I've taught them and know them, they're mine."

"And you like winning."

"Yes, I like winning."

The hospital ambulance arrived only moments before Danielle

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and Joe's wife returned. Litsi, Danielle and I waited until Joe was transferred and the ambulance men had helped his wife into the interior. We had a final view of her face, young and frightened, before they closed the doors and drove away.

There was nothing to say, really. Litsi put his arm again around Danielle's waist, and they turned and walked away. I hobbled off and showered and changed my clothes after just another fall in just another day in a working life.

When I went out of the weighing room to go to the princess's box, Maynard Allardeck stepped into my way. He was looking, as always, splendidly tailored, the total English gentleman from hat to hand-sewn shoes. He wore a striped silk tie and pigskin gloves, and his eyes were as near madness as I'd ever seen them. I stopped, my spirits sinking.

A covered veranda with three wide steps led down to the area used for unsaddling the first four horses in every race. There was a scatter of people about, but not a crowd. Maynard stood between me and the steps. "Fielding," he said with intensity, and he wasn't simply addressing me by name; he was using the word as a curse, in the way the Allardecks had used it for generations. He was cursing my ancestry and my existence, the irrational side of his hatred well in command.

He overtopped me by about four inches and outweighed me by fifty pounds, but he was twenty years older and unfit. Without the complication of a sprained ankle I could have dodged him easily, but as it was, when I took a step sideways, so did he.

"Mr. Allardeck," I said neutrally, "the princess is expecting me."

He gave no sign of hearing, nor did he move when I went past him, but two steps farther on, at the top of the steps, I received a violent shove between the shoulders.

Unbalanced, I fell, landing in a sprawl on a tarmac path at the bottom of the steps. I rolled, half expecting Maynard to jump down on me, but he was standing on the top step, staring. As I watched he turned away.

A trainer I sometimes rode for, who happened to be near, helped me to my feet. "He pushed you," he said incredulously. "I saw it. Aren't you going to complain?"

"Who to?"

"But Kit . . ." He slowly took stock of the situation. "That's Maynard Allardeck."

"Yeah."

"But he can't go around attacking you." He looked at me doubtfully. "If you want to complain, I'll say what I saw."

I thanked him again, said I wouldn't bother, and with perturbation set off again toward the princess's box.

The push itself had been a relatively small matter, but as Maynard was basically murderous, it had to be taken as a substitute killing, a relief explosion, a jet of steam to stop the top from blowing off the volcano. The film, I thought uneasily, would keep that volcano in check; I didn't want him erupting uncontrollably.

Danielle, Litsi and Beatrice were all in the princess's box when I arrived, but the princess herself was out on the balcony, huddled into her furs and alone. I went out there to join her and found her gazing blind-eyed over the racecourse.

"Princess," I said.

She turned her head, her eyes focusing on my face.

"Don't give up," I said.

"No." She stretched her neck and her backbone, as if to disclaim any thought of it. "Is Helikon all right?" she asked.

"Dusty said so," I replied. "I'll school him next week one morning to get his confidence back."

She showed a glimmer of pleasure in an otherwise unpleasurable day. She didn't ask directly after my state of health, because she never did. She considered the results of falls to lie within the domain of my personal privacy, into which she didn't intrude. It was an attitude stemming from her own habit of reticence, and far from minding it, I valued it. It was fussing I couldn't stand.

We went inside for some tea, joining the others, and presently Lord Vaughnley appeared on one of his more or less regular visits to the princess's box. After a few minutes he managed to steer me into a corner.

I thanked him for his packet of yesterday.

"What? Oh, yes, my dear chap, you're welcome. But that's not what I wanted to say to you. I'm afraid there's been a bit of a leak about the film you made of Maynard Allardeck."

I shivered. I desperately needed that film to remain secret.

"I'm afraid," Lord Vaughnley said, "that Allardeck knows you sent a copy of it to the honors people in Downing Street. He knows he will never again be considered for a knighthood, because of your sending it."

"How in hell's teeth did he find out?"

"I don't know," he said uncomfortably. "Not from me, my dear fellow, I assure you. I've never told anyone."

I looked at him in dismay. "How long has he known?"

"I think since sometime last week." He shook his head unhappily. "I heard about it this morning in a committee meeting of a charity of which Allardeck and I are both directors. He's chairman, of course. The civil service charity, you remember."

I remembered. It was through good works for the sick and needy dependents of civil servants that Maynard had tried hardest to climb to his knighthood.

"Has anyone in the charity seen the film?" I asked urgently.

"No, no, my dear fellow. They've simply heard it exists. One of them apparently asked Allardeck if he knew anything about it."

It was uncanny, I thought, how leaks could trickle through cracks. "The only copies," I said, "are the ones I gave you and the honors people, and the three I have in the bank. Unless you or the honors people show them— I can't believe they will," I said explosively. "They were all so hush-hush."

"I thought I should warn you."

"I'm glad you did." It explained so much, I thought, about Maynard's recent behavior. Considering how he must be seething with fury, just pushing me down the steps showed amazing restraint.

But then, I did still have the film, and so far it hadn't been shown to a wider audience, and Maynard really wouldn't want it shown, however much he had lost through it already.

When Lord Vaughnley had gone, we watched the last race, and in due course returned to the cars—Litsi and Danielle, deserting the Rolls, saying they were coming with me.

On the walk from the box to the parking lot, I stopped a few times to take the weight off my foot. No one made a remark, but when we arrived at my car, Danielle said positively, "I'm driving."

I sat in the passenger seat without demur, and asked her to stop at a pharmacy a short distance along the road.

"What do you need?" she said brusquely. "I'll get it."

"Some strapping and mineral water."

"Aspirin?"

"There's some here in the glove compartment."

Pulling up, she went with quick movements into the shop and returned with a paper bag, which she dumped on my lap.

"I'll tell you the scenario," she said to Litsi with a sort of suppressed violence as we set off toward London. "He'll strap his own ankle and sit with it surrounded by ice packs to reduce the swelling. He'll have hoof-shaped bruises that'll be black by tomorrow, and he'll ache all over. He won't want you to notice he can't put that foot on the ground without pain shooting up his leg. If you ask him how he feels, he'll say, 'With every nerve ending.' "

Litsi said when she paused, "You must know him very well."

It silenced Danielle. I swallowed some aspirins with the mineral water and thought about what she'd said. And Litsi was right, I reflected; she did truly know me. Unfortunately, she sounded as if she wished she didn't.

To remove the mind from scary concepts, I asked her if she'd managed to tell Beatrice that Monday was her last evening stint.

Danielle, after a lengthy pause, said that no, she hadn't.

"I wish you would," I said, alarmed. "You said you would."

"I can't tell her. What if Nanterre turns up and shoots you?"

"He won't," I said. "But if we don't catch him . . ." I paused. "The princess told me today that if Roland signs the arms contract, he will literally die of shame. He wouldn't want to go on living. She's extremely worried that he'll give in. She loves him. She wants him alive. So we've got to stop Nanterre, and soon."

Danielle didn't answer for two or three miles. It was Litsi who eventually broke the silence. "I'll tell Beatrice," he said firmly.

"No," Danielle protested.

"Last night," I said, "Nanterre killed another horse. The princess doesn't want Roland to know . . . or Beatrice, who'd tell him."

They both exclaimed in distress. "Which horse?" Danielle asked.

"Col," I said. "The one I rode at Ascot."

"That didn't quite win?" Litsi asked.

"Yes," Danielle said. "Her Gold Cup horse." She swallowed. "If Litsi tells Beatrice Monday's my last day, I won't deny it."

We spent another slightly claustrophobic evening in the house, the conversation stilted owing to everyone's having to remember what was not known and shouldn't be said. Litsi managed to tell Beatrice positively but naturally that the last time I'd be fetching Danielle at night would be Monday, as she would no longer be working in the evenings. Beatrice took in the information satisfactorily, with her eyes sliding my way, and one could almost see the cogs clicking as she added the hour to the place.

I wondered if she understood the nature of what I hoped she was going to arrange. She seemed to have no compunction about laying an ambush that would remove me from her path; but, of course, she didn't know about the attack on Litsi or about Col's death. We couldn't tell her, because either she would instantly apply breaking-point pressure to her brother by informing him or she would suffer pangs of remorse and not set up the ambush at all. Beatrice was a real wild card, I thought, who could win us or lose us the game.

Nanterre again didn't telephone, and there had been no one all day answering my advertisements about a Bradbury reward. Well, I thought in disappointment, it had seemed a good idea at the time, as Eve no doubt told Adam after the apple.

Dawson buzzed through on the intercom before seven on Sunday morning. "Phone call," he said.

Not again, I thought. I picked up the receiver with the most fearful foreboding.

"Look here," a voice said. "This message from Danielle. I don't want any trouble, but is this reward business straight up?"

"Yes," I said, dry-mouthed, "it is."

"How much, then?"

I took a deep breath. "Quite a lot," I said. "It depends how much you can tell me. I'd like to come and see you."

"Don't know about that. I don't want any trouble."

"There won't be any. You tell me where you'll meet me."

"What's your name?" he demanded.

I hesitated fractionally. "Christmas," I said.

"Well, Mr. Christmas, I'm not meeting you for less than a hundred quid." He was belligerent and suspicious.

"All right," I said slowly. "I agree."

"Up front, on the table," he said. "And if I tell you what you want to hear, you'll double it."

"If you tell me the truth, yes."

"Huh," he said sourly. "Right, then. You're in London, aren't you? That's a London number."

"Yes."

"I'll meet you in Bradbury," he said. "In the town, not the racecourse. I'll meet you in the pub there, the King's Head, halfway along the High Street. Twelve o'clock."

"I'll be there," I said. "How will I know you?"

He thought, breathing heavily. "I'll take the *Sporting Life* with your ad in it."

"And, er, what's your name?" I asked.

He had the answer to that question all ready. "John Smith," he said promptly. "I'll see you then, Mr. Christmas. Okay?"

"Okay," I said.

He disconnected, and I lay back on the pillows feeling more apprehensive than delighted. The fish, I thought, hadn't sounded securely on the hook. I just hoped he'd turn up where and when he'd said. He hadn't seemed overbright or cunning, and the amount he'd asked for, I thought, revealed a good deal about his income and his needs.

Large reward. When I hadn't objected to one hundred, he'd doubled it to two. To him, two hundred equated large.

I set about the business of getting up, which on the mornings after a crunch was always slow and twingy. The ice packs I'd put on at bedtime had long since melted, but the puffball my ankle had swollen to on the previous afternoon had definitely contracted. I took the strapping off, inspected the blackening bruising, and wrapped it up again snugly. I could still get my shoe on, which was lucky.

In trousers, shirt and sweater I went down by elevator to the basement and swiped more ice cubes from the fridge, fastening them into plastic bags and wedging them down inside my sock. Then I woke up Litsi and told him about John Smith.

He frowned. "It could be Nanterre setting a trap," he said. "I'll come with you."

I shook my head. "I'd like your company, but Sammy has the day off because we're all here, and if we both go . . ."

"All right. But don't go onto balconies. Have you enough cash?"

"Yes. In my house. I'll go there on the way. I'll be back this afternoon sometime."

"All being well," Litsi said dryly.

I DROVE to Lambourn after a particularly thorough inspection of the car. It was possible that John Smith was a trap, though on balance I didn't believe it. Nanterre couldn't have found an actor to convey the subtleties in John Smith's attitudes. John Smith might be someone trying to snatch the reward without any goods to deliver; he might be a fraud, I thought, but not a deadly danger.

My house felt cold and empty. I opened all the letters scattered there since Monday, took the ones that mattered, and dumped the junk into the dustbin. I checked my answering machine for messages, then collected a few things to take with me: clean clothes, the cash, some writing paper, a pocket-size tape recorder, and a few photographs sorted from a disorganized drawerful.

I also picked up from the kitchen a small gadget I'd bought in New York that started cars from a distance. It worked by radio, transmitting to a receiver in the car, which then switched on the ignition and activated the starter motor. I liked gadgets, and this one was useful in freezing weather, since one could start one's car from indoors and warm up the engine before plunging out into snowstorms.

I repacked my sock with new ice cubes and finally set off again to Bradbury, arriving in the small country town with ten minutes to spare. The King's Head, I found, was a smallish brick building, relatively modern, and dedicated to beer. No old-world charm, no warming pans, oak beams, pewter mugs.

I parked in the street and went into the public bar. There were three customers—two playing darts and one sitting on the edge of a bench looking at his watch. In front of him on a low table lay Saturday's *Sporting Life*.

I went over and sat down on the bench. "Mr. Smith?" I said.

He jumped nervously. He was perhaps in his fifties, wore a zip-fronted fawn jacket, and had an air of habitual defeat. His hair, still black, was brushed in careful lines across a balding scalp, and the tip of his nose pointed straight down, as if someone had punched it that way long ago.

"My name's Christmas," I said.

He looked at me carefully and frowned. "I know you, don't I?"

"Maybe," I said. "I brought your money. Would you like a drink?"

"I'll get it," he said. He went over to the bar. I laid in front of me the large brown envelope that contained Lord Vaughnley's file photograph of Nanterre. The envelope currently bulged also with the tape recorder, four more photographs, two bundles of bank notes and some plain writing paper. I put a hand into the envelope, switched on the tape recorder, and drew out the first of the bundles of money, laying it on the table.

He came back at length with a pint and drank a third of it thirstily. "You're that jockey," he said. "Kit Fielding."

I could feel alarm vibrating in him at the identification, and I pushed the money toward him. "A hundred," I said, "up front."

He stretched out a big-knuckled hand, picked up the booty, checked it, and slotted it into an internal pocket.

"Tell me what happened," I said.

"Look, I don't want this going any further," he said nervously. "I've been in two minds. . . . See, by right I shouldn't have been at the races. I was supposed to be at work. I made out I'd got flu. I wouldn't get fired if the bosses found out, just a dressing-down, but I don't want the wife knowing, see what I mean? She's dead set against gambling."

"I'm sure it won't get about, Mr. Smith," I said.

He jumped again slightly at the name.

"The name's not Smith, I expect you guessed. But well, if you don't know, I'm that much safer, see what I mean?"

"Yes," I said.

He drank most of the beer and wiped his mouth with a handkerchief. "I'd been looking at the horses in the paddock," he said, "when this character came up to me and offered me a fiver to deliver a message."

"A fiver," I said.

"Yeah. . . . Well, I said, 'Ten, and you're on.' He wasn't pleased, but in the end he coughed up. Ten smackers. It meant I'd be betting free on that race, see what I mean?"

"Yes," I said.

"So he says, this character, that all I'd got to do was walk over to a man he would point out and tell him that Danielle wanted him to go up to the balcony to see the view."

"He said that precisely?"

"He made me repeat this twice. Then he gave me two fivers, pointed at a big man in a dark overcoat, very distinguished-looking, and when I turned round, he'd gone. Anyway, I passed on the message and went out and put two fivers on Applejack."

Mr. Smith was a loser, I thought. I'd beaten Applejack into second place, on Pinkeye.

"Look," he said. "You'd better tell me. Was it the man I gave the message to who fell off the balcony?" His eyes were worried.

"I'm afraid so."

"I thought it would be. I didn't see him fall, but later on I heard people talking about coats and such. I didn't know what they were on about until the next day, when it was all in the paper." He shook his head. "I couldn't say anything, though, could I, on account of being at the races when I'd said I wasn't."

"Difficult," I agreed.

"It wasn't my fault he fell off the balcony," he said aggrievedly. "And he wasn't killed, thanks to you, so no harm done."

"No," I said, "he wasn't killed. But he was curious about the message. The man who gave it to you," I added casually, "do you remember what he looked like?"

Mr. Smith sensed that this was a crucial question and looked meaningfully at the envelope.

"The second hundred's yours," I said, "if you describe him."

"He wasn't English," he said, taking the plunge. "Strong sort of character, hard voice, big nose."

"Would you know him again?" I asked.

"I've been thinking about him since Thursday," he said simply. "I reckon I would."

Without making a big thing of it, I pulled the five photographs out of the envelope, all eight-by-ten black-and-white glossy pictures of people receiving trophies after races. In four of the groups the winning jockey was Fielding, but I'd had my back to the camera in two of them; the pictures were as fair a test as I'd been able to devise at short notice.

"Would you look at these photographs and see if he's there?"

He brought out a pair of glasses and looked carefully. I'd put Nanterre's picture in fourth place of the five. He glanced at it, then passed on to the fifth. "Well," he said judiciously, "yes, he's there."

I watched him breathlessly.

"Look," he said. "You're Kit Fielding, right? You're not short of a bob or two. And that man who fell, he looked pretty well heeled. Make it two fifty, and I'll tell you which one he is."

I breathed deeply and pretended to be considering it. "All right," I said eventually. "Two fifty."

He flicked through the photographs and pointed unerringly to Nanterre. "Him," he said.

"You've got your two fifty." I gave him the second bundle, then fished out my wallet.

He nodded and put the money away carefully.

"Mr. Smith," I said easily, "what would you do for another hundred?"

He stared at me. "What do you mean?"

I said, "If I write a sentence on a sheet of paper, will you sign your name to it? The name John Smith will do very well."

"What sentence?" he said, looking worried again.

I pulled a sheet of plain writing paper from the envelope, unclipped my pen, and wrote:

> At Bradbury races [I put the date] I gave a man a message to the effect that Danielle wanted him to go up to the viewing balcony. I identify the man who gave me that message as the man I have indicated in the photograph.

I handed the paper to Mr. Smith. He read it. He was unsure of the consequences of signing, but he was thinking of a hundred pounds. I handed him my pen. He did as I'd asked.

"Great," I said, taking the page and slipping it, with the photographs, back into the envelope. I took out my wallet again and gave him another hundred pounds, and saw him looking almost hungrily at the money he could see I still had.

"There's another hundred and fifty in there," I said, showing him. "It would round you up to five hundred altogether."

He liked the game increasingly. He said, "For that, what would you want?"

"To save me following you home," I said pleasantly, "I'd like you to write your real name and address down for me, on a separate sheet of paper." I produced a clean sheet from the envelope. "You still have my pen," I reminded him. "Be a good fellow and write. I won't tell your wife you were at the races."

"For a hundred and fifty?" he said weakly.

"Yes."

He wrote a name and address in capital letters: "A. V. Hodges, 44 Carleton Avenue, Widderlawn, near Bradbury."

"Okay," I said. "Here's the rest of your money." I counted it out for him. "Don't lose it all at once."

Shamefacedly he raised a laugh. "I can't go racing often, see what I mean? My wife knows how much money I've got."

"She doesn't now," I said cheerfully.

Chapter 11

I DROVE back to Eaton Square and found Litsi coming out of the library as I entered the hall.

"I saw you coming," he said lazily. The library windows looked out on the street. "A purring cat, if ever I saw one."

I smiled and nodded toward the library. "Let's go in there, and I'll tell you."

I carried the big envelope into the long, paneled room with its grille-fronted bookshelves. As we walked, Litsi looked down at my feet. "Are you squelching?" he asked disbelievingly.

"Mm." I put down the envelope and peeled off my left shoe, into which one of the ice packs had leaked.

To his horror I pulled the one intact plastic bag out of my sock and emptied the contents onto a potted plant. The second bag followed the first into the wastepaper basket. I pulled off my drenched sock and replaced my wet shoe. "I suppose," he said, "all that started out as mobile refrigeration."

"Quite right." I took the envelope over to where a pair of armchairs stood on opposite sides of a table. I sat in one chair. Litsi, following, took the other.

"Mr. Smith," I said, "can speak for himself."

I put the small recorder on the table, rewound the cassette, and started it going. Litsi listened with wry fascination to the way he'd been set up. I showed him the paper John Smith had signed, and drew a circle around the head of Nanterre in the photograph.

"What are you going to do with these things?" he asked.

"With a bit of luck," I said, "this." And I told him.

GRATEFUL for the elevator, I went up three floors to the bamboo room to stow away my gear and shower and change. Beatrice wasn't in the sitting room when I went down for the evening; only Danielle and the princess, with Litsi pouring their drinks.

I bowed to the princess and kissed Danielle on the cheek.

"Where have you been?" Danielle asked neutrally.

"Fishing."

"Did you catch anything?"

"Shark bait," I said.

She looked at me swiftly, laughingly, the old loving Danielle there and gone in a flash. I took the glass into which Litsi had poured a scant ounce of Scotch and tried to stifle regret. Then Beatrice walked into the room and stood vaguely in the center, as if not sure what to do next. Litsi began to mix her drink, and she went across to the sofa where the princess was sitting and took the place beside her.

"There we are, Beatrice," Litsi said with good humor, setting her Bloody Mary down on the low table in front of her. "Dash of Worcestershire, twist of lemon."

Beatrice looked at the drink unseeingly. "Casilia," she said, as if the words were hurting her throat, "I have been such a fool."

"My dear Beatrice . . ." the princess said.

Beatrice without warning started to cry. The princess looked uncomfortable, and it was Litsi who came to Beatrice's aid with a large white handkerchief and comforting noises. She wailed with her mouth twisted into an agonized circle, and pressed Litsi's handkerchief to her eyes.

"Do pull yourself together, Beatrice, dear," the princess said with a touch of astringency. "We can't help you until we know what's the matter."

Beatrice's faintly theatrical paroxysm abated. "I can't help it," she said, drying her eyes and blotting her mascara carefully, laying the folded edge of handkerchief flat over her lower eyelid and blinking her top lashes onto it, leaving tiny black streaks. "I've been such a fool."

"In what way, dear?" asked the princess.

"I . . . I've been talking to Henri Nanterre," Beatrice said.

"When?" Litsi asked swiftly.

"Just now. Upstairs, in my room."

"You telephoned him?" Litsi said.

"Yes, of course." Beatrice began to recover such wits as she had. "Well, I mean . . . I . . . He was so charming when he came to see me in Palm Beach, but I've been wrong, terribly wrong."

"What did he say just now?" Litsi asked.

"He said"—she looked at him a shade wildly—"that he'd thought Roland would crack when you were nearly killed. He asked me why he hadn't. But I . . . I didn't know you'd been nearly killed. I said I was sure Roland and Casilia didn't either, and he was furiously angry, shouting." She shook her head.

The princess looked astounded. "Litsi! What happened? You never said . . ."

"Henri boasted," Beatrice said miserably, "that he organized an accident for Litsi that would have succeeded brilliantly, except that this . . . this . . ." She didn't know what to call me and contented herself in pointing. "*He* saved Litsi's life." Beatrice gulped. "I never thought . . . never ever, that Henri would do anything so frightful. And he said he thought Roland and Casilia wouldn't have wanted any more horses killed, and how had she reacted about her horse called Col? And when I told him I didn't know anything about it, he flew into a rage. He said he'd never thought they would hold out so long. It was all taking too long, and he would step up the pressure."

Beatrice's shock was deep. "He said," she went on, "the jockey was always in his way, blocking him, bringing in guards and recording telephones; so he would get rid of the jockey first. Then, after that, Danielle would lose her beauty, and then no one would stop Roland from signing. He said," she added, her eyes round and dry again, "I was to tell Roland what he'd threatened. I was to say he had telephoned here and I'd happened to answer."

The princess, aghast but straight-backed, said, "I won't let you tell Roland anything, Beatrice."

"Henri hung up," Beatrice said, "and I sat there thinking he didn't mean it; he couldn't possibly spoil Danielle's face. But he did chase after her that evening, and he did kill the horses; he boasted of it. I didn't want to believe he had tried to kill Litsi . . . to kill! It wasn't possible, but he sounded so vicious." She turned imploringly to the princess. "I may have been foolish, but I'm not wicked, Casilia."

I listened to the outpouring with profound disturbance. I didn't want her late-flowering remorse tangling the carefully laid lines.

"Did you ring him back?" I asked.

"He'd said I couldn't reach him again at that number."

"How many times have you talked to him?" Litsi asked mildly. "And at what time of day?"

Beatrice hesitated but answered, "Today and yesterday, at about six, and Thursday morning, and . . ." She tried to remember. "It must have been Wednesday evening at six, and Monday twice, after I'd found out . . ." Her voice trailed away.

"Found out what?" Litsi asked.

She said unhappily, "The make and color of Danielle's car. He wanted to know. I had no idea that he meant to attack her. Danielle," she said beseechingly, turning to her, "I'd never cause harm to you, ever."

"But on Thursday you told him Danielle and I were going to Bradbury races," Litsi commented.

"Yes, but he *asked* me to tell him things like that," Beatrice said fiercely. "He said as it was important to me for him to succeed, I should help him with details, any details, however tiny."

Litsi asked, "Did Henri promise you a nice present, perhaps, if he succeeded?"

Beatrice looked uncertainly at the princess; then to Litsi she said self-excusingly, "I have the de Brescou trust fund, of course, but it's expensive to keep one's position in Palm Beach. My soirees—you know, just for fifty dear friends, nothing large—and my servants—just a married couple—are barely enough, and Henri said that when his pistols were in production, he would send a gift of two hundred and fifty thousand, and a hundred thousand each year afterward for three years. Not so very much, but it would have made a useful difference to me, you see."

A soiree for a hundred, I thought sardonically.

Beatrice seemed to be feeling better about things, as if full confession excused the sin. I was anxious to know how much information she'd passed on before this change of heart.

"Mrs. Bunt," I said diffidently, "if Henri Nanterre told you he was going to get rid of the jockey, did he say how? Or did you perhaps tell him where I'd be going and when, in the way you told him about Danielle and Litsi?"

She simply stared at me. Litsi, understanding what I wanted to know, said, "Beatrice, if you've told Nanterre where Kit might be vulnerable, you must tell us now. Seriously, you must."

She looked at him defensively. "It's because of him"—she meant me—"that Roland hasn't agreed to Henri's plans. Roland told me so. So did *he*." She jerked her head in my direction. "He said it straight out at dinner. You heard him. Everything's his fault. It was he who drove Henri to do all those awful things. It's because of him that I probably won't get my money. So when Henri asked me if I could find out when and where the jockey would be alone . . . well, I said I would. And I was glad to!"

"Aunt Beatrice!" Danielle exclaimed. "How could you?"

"He has my room," Beatrice said explosively. "*My room*."

There was a small, intense silence. Then I said mildly, "If you'd tell us what you told Nanterre, I wouldn't go there . . . wherever."

"You must tell us," the princess said vehemently. "If any harm comes to Kit because of you, Beatrice, you will never be received again, either in this house or in the château."

Beatrice looked stunned at this direst of threats.

"Moreover," Litsi said in a tone loaded with strength, "you are not my relation. I have no family feeling for you. You gave information that might have led to my death. If you've done the same regarding Kit, and Nanterre succeeds in killing him, you'll be guilty of conspiracy to murder, and I'll inform the police to that effect."

Beatrice crumbled totally. She said with a touch of sullenness, "I told Henri where he keeps his car while he's here. This evening I told Henri that he'll be fetching Danielle for the last time tomorrow, that he goes round to his car at one thirty in the morning. Henri said that was excellent."

The princess was shocked. "That dark mews!" she said, horrified. "Kit, don't go down there."

"No," I assured her. "I'll park somewhere else." She nodded; then, hardly able to look at her sister-in-law, she rose from the sofa and headed for the door, motioning for me to go with her.

I followed. She went into the dining room and asked me to close the door, which I did.

She said with intense worry, "Nothing has changed, has it, because of what Beatrice has told us?"

"No," I said with a thankfulness she didn't hear.

"We can't go on and on. We can't risk Danielle's face. You can't risk that." The dilemma was dreadful, as Nanterre had meant.

"No," I said, "I can't risk that. But give me until Tuesday. Don't let Monsieur know of the threats until then. We have a plan. We have a lever, but we need a stronger one. We'll get rid of Nanterre," I promised, "if you'll give us that time."

"You and Litsi?"

"Yes."

"Litsi was the man who fell from the balcony," she said, wanting confirmation.

I nodded, then asked if I could have ten minutes' private conversation with her husband. Without more ado she whisked me up in the elevator, saw me in, and left us. I took the red leather armchair as indicated by Roland.

"How can I help you?" he said civilly.

"Monsieur, I wondered if I could go to see your lawyer, Gerald Greening, early tomorrow morning."

"Is this to do with Henri Nanterre?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Could you say why you want Gerald?"

I explained. He said wearily that he saw no prospect of success, but that I needn't go to Gerald's office; Gerald would come to the house. Roland telephoned him personally, and in a short time the appointment was made.

At eight thirty the next morning Litsi and I entertained Gerald Greening at breakfast in the morning room, where he ate copiously of kippers followed by eggs and bacon, all furnished by Dawson, forewarned.

"Mm, no problem at all," Greening said as we explained what we wanted. From his briefcase he produced a pad of white paper, upon which he made notes. "Yes, yes," he said busily, writing away. "I get the gist, absolutely. You want your intentions cast into foolproof legal language, and you want this typed up properly this morning and furnished with seals?"

"Yes, please," we said. "Two copies."

"No problem. I can bring them back here by"—he consulted his watch—"say, twelve noon. Anything else?"

"Yes," Litsi said, fetching from a side table the French form that had been in the notary's briefcase. I had given it to him for safekeeping, in case Beatrice took the bamboo room by force. "We need some advice on this." He handed it over.

Gerald Greening said in surprise, "Surely the Frenchman took that with him when Monsieur de Brescou refused to sign?"

"This is a duplicate blank copy, not filled in, " Litsi said. "We think the one Nanterre wanted signed would have represented the first page of a whole document. Kit and I want this unused copy to form page one of our own document." He passed it to Greening. "As you see, it's a general form of contract, with spaces for details, and in French, of course. It must be binding or Nanterre wouldn't have used it. I propose to write in French in the spaces provided, so that this and the accompanying document together constitute a binding contract under French law. I'd be grateful," he said in his most princely tone, "if you would advise me as to wording."

"In French?" Greening said apprehensively.

"In English. I'll translate."

They worked on it together until each was satisfied. Then Greening left—to reappear, true to his word, at ten minutes to twelve. We took him into the office, and there we stapled to the front page of one of Greening's imposing-looking documents the original French form, and a photocopy of it to another, each form with the new wording typed in neatly, leaving large spaces for signing. Each space for a signature was provided with a round red seal.

From there we rode up in the elevator to Roland de Brescou's private sitting room, where he and the princess and Danielle were all waiting. Gerald Greening presented the documents to each of them in turn, and to Litsi, asking them each to sign their names four times, once on each of the French forms, once at the end of each document.

Greening made everyone say aloud archaic words about signing, sealing and delivering, made them put a finger on each seal, and witnessed each signature himself with precision. He required that I also witness each signature, which I did.

"That's splendid," he said expansively, and began looking around him and at his watch expectantly.

"And now, Gerald, some sherry?" the princess suggested.

"Princess Casilia, what a lovely idea!" he said.

I excused myself on the ground that I was riding in the two thirty at Windsor and should have left fifteen minutes ago.

Litsi picked up the signed documents, returned them to the large envelope Greening had brought them in, and handed it to me. "Don't forget to telephone. Good luck," he said.

They all thought he meant with the races.

The princess almost never went to Windsor races, having no box there. Litsi was covering for Sammy, who was supposed to be resting. I hadn't expected Danielle to come with me, but she followed me out of Roland's room and said, "If I come with you, can you get me to work by six thirty?"

"With an hour to spare."

"Shall I come?"

"Yes," I said.

She nodded and went off to fetch a coat, and we walked around to the mews in a reasonable replica of the old companionship. She was wearing the fur-lined green-gray waterproof jacket I'd given her for Christmas, also black trousers, a white high-necked sweater, and a wide floral chintz headband holding back her cloud of dark hair. The consensus among other jockeys that she was a knockout had never found me disagreeing.

I drove fast to Windsor, and we hurried from parking lot to weighing room, finding Dusty hovering about there. "What about your ankle?" he said suspiciously. "You're still limping."

"Not when I'm riding," I said.

Dusty gave me a look as good as his name and scurried away, and Danielle said she would go buy a sandwich and coffee. She'd become friendly with the wife of a Lambourn trainer I often rode for and with the wives of one or two other jockeys.

"I'm not riding in the fourth; we'll watch that together," I said.

"Yes. Go in and change. You're late."

I'd taken the packet of documents to the racecourse rather than leave it in the car, and in the changing room gave it into the safekeeping of my valet.

It wasn't a demanding day from the riding point of view. I won the first of my races—the second on the card—by twenty lengths, which Dusty said was too far, and lost the next by the same distance, again to his disapproval. The next was the fourth race, which I spent in the stands with Danielle. I told her the news of Joe, the jockey injured at Sandown, who was on the mend, and she said she'd had coffee with Betsy, the Lambourn trainer's wife. Everything was fine, she said, just fine.

It was the third of March, blustery and cold, and I went out to the fifth race wondering if the day was some sort of test; if Danielle was finding out for herself with finality whether or not she could face what life with me entailed.

I finished third in the race, and when I returned to the unsaddling enclosure, Danielle was standing there waiting, looking pale and visibly trembling. "What is it?" I said sharply, sliding down from the horse. "What's the matter?"

"He's here," she said. "Henri Nanterre. I'm sure it's him."

"Look," I said, "I've got to weigh in. I'll come straight back out. You just stand right outside the weighing-room door. Don't move from there."

She went where I pointed, and I unsaddled the horse, passed the scales, gave my saddle, whip and helmet to my valet, and went out to her. "Where did you see him?" I asked.

"In the stands, during the race. He seemed to be edging toward me. He was just like the photograph. I was"—she swallowed—"terrified. He sort of snaked around people, sliding like an eel."

"That's him," I said grimly.

"I slid away from him," Danielle said. "It was like panic. When

I got out of the stands, the race was over. And I ran. What am I going to do? You're riding in the next race."

"Well, what you're going to do is dead boring, but you'll be safe." I smiled apologetically. "Go into the ladies' and stay there. Tell the attendant you're sick, faint, tired—anything. Stay there until after the race, and I'll come and fetch you. I'll send someone in with a message. We'll need a password."

"Christmas Day," she said.

"Okay. Don't come out without the password, and try not to let Nanterre see you going in there, but if he does . . ."

"Don't come out," she said. "Don't worry, I won't."

"Danielle."

"Yes?"

"I do love you," I said.

She blinked, ducked her head, and went away fast. Of course Nanterre had known I would be at Windsor races, I thought. He had only to look in the newspaper. I, and anyone in the princess's family, was vulnerable everywhere, not just in dark alleys.

I rode that last race at Windsor with extreme concentration, particularly as it was a steeplechase for novice jumpers, always an unpredictable event. My mount was trained not by Wykeham but by Betsy's husband, the Lambourn trainer, and it would be fair to say he got a good schooling run rather than a flat-out scramble.

I weighed in for fourth place, changed fast, collected my valuables from the valet, and wrote a short note for Danielle: "Christmas Day has dawned. Time to go."

It was Betsy who took the note into the ladies', coming out smiling with Danielle a minute later. Betsy shook her head over our childish games, and Danielle and I went out to the rapidly emptying parking lot.

My car stood almost alone at the end of a row. I stopped well before we reached it and brought the car starter out of my pocket.

"But that," Danielle said in surprise, "is your toy for freezes."

"Mm," I said, and pressed its switch. There was no explosion. The engine started sweetly, purring to life. We went on toward it.

"What if it had blown up?" Danielle said.

"Better the car than us."

"Do you think he *would?*"

"I really don't know. I don't mind taking precautions that turn out to be unnecessary. It's 'if only' that would be embarrassing."

I drove out onto the motorway and at the first intersection went off it and around, and started back in the opposite direction.

"More avoidance of if only?" Danielle said with irony.

"Well, we don't know Nanterre's car, and I'd not like him to jump us in those small streets at Chiswick." At the next intersection I reversed the process, and Danielle studied the traffic out the rear window.

"Nothing came all the way round after us," she said.

"Good. The man who's coming to fetch you tonight is called Swallow," I said. "When the car comes for you, get the reception desk to ask him his name. If he doesn't say Swallow, check up with the car-hire firm." I slid my wallet out. "Their card's in there, in the front."

She took the card. "What haven't you thought of?"

"I wish I knew."

Even with the wrong-direction detour it was a short journey from Windsor to Chiswick, and we arrived in the streets leading to the studio a good hour before six thirty.

"Do you want to go in early?" I asked.

"No. . . . Park the car where we can sit and look at the river."

I found a spot where we could see brown water sliding by, covering the mud flats as the tide came in. There were sea gulls flying against the wind, raucously calling.

"I have, er, something to tell you," Danielle said.

"No," I said with pain.

"You don't know what it is."

"Today was a test," I said.

She said slowly, "I forget sometimes that you can read minds."

"I can't. Not often. You know that."

"You just did."

"There are better days than today," I said hopelessly.

"And worse."

I nodded.

"Don't look so sad," she said. "I can't bear it."

"I'll give it up if you'll marry me," I said.

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

She didn't seem overjoyed. I'd lost, it seemed, on all counts.

"I . . . er . . ." she said faintly. "If you don't give it up, I'll marry you."

I thought I hadn't heard right. "*What* did you say?"

"I said . . ." She stopped. "Do you want to marry me or don't you?"

"That's a very silly question."

I leaned toward her and she to me, and our kiss was like a homecoming. For a long time we sat with our arms around each other, which after the past weeks I found unbelievable, and boringly said so several times over.

"I didn't mean to do this," she said. "When I came back from the Lake District, I was going to find a way of saying it was all over, a mistake."

"What changed your mind?"

"I don't know, lots of things. Being with you so much. Missing you yesterday. Odd things. Betsy saying I was lucky. And Joe's wife. . . . I asked her how she lived with the fear. She said if it was fear and Joe against no fear, no Joe, the choice was easy."

I held her close. I could feel her heart beating.

"Today I was wandering about, looking at things," she said. "Wondering if I wanted a life of racecourses and perpetual anxiety. And I thought of what life would be like without you. No fear, no Kit, as she said. I guess I'll take the fear."

It was odd, I thought, how life could totally change from one minute to the next. The fog of wretchedness of the past month had vanished like ruptured cobwebs. I felt light-headedly, miraculously happy, more even than in the beginning. Perhaps one truly had to have lost and regained to know that sort of joy.

"You won't change your mind, will you?" I said.

"No, I won't," she answered, and spent a fair time doing her best to show me she meant it.

Eventually I saw her into the studio, and drove back toward Eaton Square on euphoric autopilot, returning to earth in time to park carefully in the usual place in the mews. Then I telephoned the house, and got Litsi immediately, as if he'd been waiting.

"I'm in the alley," I said.

Chapter 12

We didn't know how he would come, or when, or even if. We'd shown him an opportunity and loaded him with a motive, but whether or not he would accept the invitation, heaven alone knew.

I was sitting not in my own car but on a foam cushion on the floor inside the garage where Danielle was keeping her little Ford. One of the garage doors was open about a hand's span, enough for me to see my Mercedes and a good deal of the mews, looking up toward the road entrance. All the garages were silent; dusk had turned to night. I sat quietly with a few necessities at hand, like Perrier, smoked salmon and an apple, and every half hour or so I rose to my feet, stretched, paced around Danielle's car, and sat down again. The hands of my watch traveled like slugs: eight o'clock, nine o'clock, ten.

I thought of Danielle and of what she'd said when I left her. "For Aunt Casilia's sake I hope that rattlesnake turns up in the mews, but if you get yourself killed, I'll never forgive you."

"A thought for eternity," I'd said.

The rattlesnake, I thought, yawning as eleven o'clock passed, was taking his time. I normally went around to the mews at one thirty so as to be at Chiswick before two. If Nanterre was planning a direct physical attack of any sort, he should be here well before that time. He hadn't been here before seven, because I'd searched every cranny before settling in.

At eleven fifteen I stretched my legs around Danielle's car and sat down again.

At eleven seventeen he came to the lure.

He walked down the center of the mews, as if he owned a car there, moving with a distinctive, eellike lope, fluid and smooth. Even in the dim light from the high windows of the surrounding buildings, the nose and jaw were unmistakable.

He came closer, and for one appalling moment he looked straight at the partly opened door of the garage where I sat, but I was immobile in dark clothes in dark shadow. I started breathing again when he appeared to see nothing to alarm him. He looked back the way he'd come, but nothing stirred behind him.

He stopped beside my car and coolly fiddled about, opening the passenger seat door with some sort of key. Well, well, I thought, and heard him unlatch the hood with the release knob inside the car. He raised the hood, propped it open, and leaned over the engine with a flashlight, as if working on a fault; anyone coming into the mews at that point would have paid no attention.

After a while he switched off the flashlight and closed the hood gently, latching it by downward pressure of both palms, not by a more normal brisk slam. Finally he shut the passenger door quietly, and as he turned away I saw he was smiling.

I wondered whether what he'd left by my engine was plastic, like his guns.

He'd walked several paces along the mews before I stood and slid out through the door. I waited until he was nearing a small white car parked on one side, and then I ran swiftly up behind him and shone a flashlight on the back of his neck.

"Henri Nanterre," I said.

For a long moment he was unable to move, from shock. Then he tore at his bloused gabardine jacket, trying to free the pistol holstered beneath.

"Sammy," I yelled, and Sammy shot like a screaming cannonball out of the small white car, my voice and his whooping cries filling the quiet place with nerve-breaking noise.

Nanterre, his face rigid, pulled the pistol free. He swung it toward me, taking aim, and Sammy, true to his boast, kicked it straight out of his hand.

The gun clattered to the ground as Nanterre ran. Sammy and I ran after him. From another, larger parked car Thomas and Litsi emerged, shouting and shining bright flashlights, blocking his way.

They stopped him, and Sammy and I caught hold of him, Sammy tying Nanterre's left wrist to Thomas' right with nylon cord and an intriguingly nice line of knots. For all the noise we'd made, no one came; no one in London would be so foolish. Dark alleys were dark alleys, and with noise, even worse.

We made Nanterre walk back toward the Mercedes. When we reached the pistol, Sammy picked it up, weighed it in his hand, and briefly whistled.

"Bullets?" I asked.

He slid out the clip and nodded. "Seven. Bright little darlin's."

He slapped the gun together again and dodged off sideways to hide it under a nearby car.

Nanterre was beginning to bluster that what we were doing was against the law. He was not right. Citizen's arrests were perfectly legal.

Not knowing what to expect, we had made the best plans we could to meet anything that might happen. I'd hired the small white car and the larger dark one, both with tinted windows, and Thomas and I had parked them that morning in spaces that weren't going to obstruct anyone else. Litsi, Thomas and Sammy had entered the cars after I'd searched the whole place, and they'd been prepared to wait until one thirty.

No one had known what Nanterre would do if he came to the mews. Or if he came, whether he might decide to sit in his car out in the street, waiting for me to walk around from the square. There had been the danger that even if he came, we could lose him, that he'd slip through our grasp and escape; and there had been the worse danger that we would panic him into shooting and someone could be hurt.

We had meant, if we captured Nanterre, to take him into the garage where I'd waited, but I did a fast rethink on the way down the alley and stopped by my car.

"Thomas," I said, "untie your wrist and attach Mr. Nanterre to the rearview mirror that's beside the front passenger door."

Thomas took a loop of cord off one of his fingers and pulled it, and all the knots around his wrist fell apart; Sammy's talents seemed endless. Thomas tied much more secure knots around the sturdy mirror assembly, and Nanterre told us very loudly that we were making punishable mistakes.

"Shut up," I said equally loudly.

"Let's gag him," Thomas said cheerfully. He produced a used handkerchief from his trouser pocket, at the sight of which Nanterre blessedly stopped talking.

"Gag him if someone comes into the mews," I said, and Thomas nodded.

"Was there enough light," I asked Litsi, Sammy and Thomas, "for you to see Mr. Nanterre lift up the hood of my car?"

They all said that they'd seen him.

Nanterre's mouth fell open; for the first time he seemed to realize he was in serious trouble.

"Mr. Nanterre," I said to the others, "is an amateur who has left his fingerprints all over my paintwork. It might be a good idea at this point to bring in the police." Nanterre suddenly tugged frantically at the knots. "There's an alternative," I added.

Nanterre, still struggling, said furiously, "What alternative?"

"Tell us why you came here tonight, and what you put in my car."

"*Tell* you . . ."

"Yes. Tell us."

He was a stupid man, essentially. He said violently, "All that stood between me and my millions was Roland's signature and you . . . you . . . everywhere in my way."

"So you decided on a little bomb, and poof, no obstructions?"

"You made me," he shouted. "You drove me. If you were dead, he would sign."

I let a moment go by; then I said, "We talked to the man who gave your message to Prince Litsi at Bradbury. He picked you out from a photograph. We have his signed statement. Did you mean Prince Litsi to die?"

"Live, die, I didn't care. To frighten him, yes. To get Roland de Brescou to sign." He tried still to unravel his bonds. "Let me go."

I went instead into the garage where I'd waited, and came out with the big envelope of signed documents. "Stop struggling," I said, "and listen carefully. The price of your freedom is that you put your signature to these contracts."

"What are they?" he said, outraged. "What contracts?"

"They change the name of the de Brescou et Nanterre construction company to the Gascony construction company, and they constitute an agreement between the two equal owners to turn the private company into a public company and for each owner to put his entire holding up for public sale."

He was astounded. "The company is *mine*. I will never agree!"

"You'll have to," I said prosaically. I produced the small tape recorder from my pocket, pressed the rewind button slightly, and started it playing. Nanterre's voice came out clearly. "Live, die, I didn't care. To frighten him, yes. To get Roland de Brescou to sign."

I switched off the tape. Nanterre was silent, remembering, perhaps, other incriminating things he had said.

"We have the evidence of the messenger at Bradbury," I said. "We have your voice on this tape. We have your bomb, I suspect, in my car. You'll sign the contract, you know."

"There's no bomb in your car," he said sullenly.

"Perhaps a firework?" I said.

He looked at me blankly.

"Someone's coming into the mews," Thomas said urgently. "What do we do?" A car was being driven toward its garage.

"If you yell," I said to Nanterre, "the police will be here in five minutes. They're not kind to people who plant bombs in cars."

The car stopped just before reaching the small white car. The occupants opened their garage and drove in. They looked our way dubiously as they came out and closed the doors.

"Good night," I called out, full of cheer.

"Good night," they replied, reassured, and walked away.

"Right," I said, relaxing. "Time to sign."

"I will not sell the company. I will not."

I said patiently, "You have no alternative, except going to prison for attempting to murder both Prince Litsi and myself."

He still refused to face facts. I brought the car-starting gadget out of my pocket and explained what it was.

Nanterre at last began to shake, and Litsi, Sammy and Thomas backed away from the car in freshly awakened alarm, as if realizing for the first time what was in there under the hood.

"It'll be lonely for you," I said to Nanterre. "We'll walk to the end of the mews, leaving you here. When Prince Litsi and the other two are safely back in the house in Eaton Square, I'll press the switch that starts my engine."

Litsi, Sammy and Thomas had already retreated a good way along the mews.

"You'll die by your own bomb," I said, and put into my voice every shred of force and conviction I could. "Good-bye."

I turned away. Walked several steps.

"Come back," he yelled.

I stopped.

"Come back."

I went back. There was sweat in great drops on his forehead.

"I want to make guns," he said feverishly. "I'd make millions. The de Brescous are rich. The Nanterres never were. I want to be rich by world standards, to have power. I'll give you a million pounds. More, if you get Roland to sign."

"No," I said flatly, and turned away again.

"All right, all right." Finally he gave in completely, almost sobbing. "Put that thing down. . . . Put it down."

I called up the mews, "Litsi."

The other three stopped and came slowly back.

"Mr. Nanterre will sign." I put the starter back in my pocket.

I showed Nanterre the contracts more closely. "We need your signature four times," I said. "On each front page, and on the last page of each attached document. When you sign the documents, put your forefinger on the red seal beside your name. The three of us who are not in any way involved in the de Brescou et Nanterre business will sign under your name as witnesses."

I put my pen into his shaking right hand and rested the first of the documents on top of my car.

Nanterre signed the French form. I turned to the last page of the longer contract and pointed to the space allotted to him. He signed again and put his finger on the seal.

With enormous internal relief I produced the second set for a repeat performance. In silence, with sweat dripping off his cheeks, he signed again.

I put my name under his in all four places, followed each time by Thomas and Sammy.

"That's fine," I said when all were completed. "Monsieur de Brescou's lawyers will put the contracts into operation at once. One of these two contracts will be sent to you or your lawyers in France." I put the documents back into their envelope and handed it to Litsi. "We'll untie you from the mirror so you can remove what you put in my car. After that you can go."

He shuddered, but it seemed not very difficult for him, in the end, to unfix the wiring and remove what looked like, in size and shape, a bag of sugar. It was the detonator sticking out of it that he treated with respect, unclipping and separating, and stowing the pieces in several pockets. "Now let me go," he said, wiping sweat from his face.

I said, "Remember, we'll always have the messenger's affidavit and the tape recording of your voice. And we all heard what you said. Stay away from the de Brescous; cause no more trouble."

He gave me a furious glare. Sammy cut the nylon cord off Nanterre's wrist with scissors. He gave us all a last comprehensive, unashamed, unrepentant stare, and with Thomas and Sammy stepping aside to let him pass, he walked away along the mews, that nose, that jaw still strong, but the shoulders sagging.

We watched him in silence until he reached the end of the mews and turned into the street, not looking back. Then Sammy let out a "youweee" yell of victory and went to fetch the pistol from where he'd hidden it.

He presented it to me with a flourish. "Spoils of war," he said, grinning.

LITSI and I drank brandy in the sitting room to celebrate, having thanked Thomas and Sammy copiously for their support; and we telephoned Danielle to tell her we weren't lying in puddles of blood.

"I suppose what we did was thoroughly immoral," Litsi said after I'd disconnected. "We took the law into our own hands."

"Justice," I said, "in our own hands. He's free, unpunished and rich, and in a way that's not justice. But he didn't, and can't, destroy Monsieur de Brescou. It was a fair enough bargain."

I waited up for Danielle after Litsi had gone yawning downstairs, and went to meet her when I heard her come in. She walked straight into my arms, smiling.

"I didn't think you'd go to bed without me," she said.

"As seldom as possible for the rest of my life."

We went quietly up to the bamboo room and, mindful of Beatrice next door, quietly to bed and quietly to love. Intensity, I thought—drowning in sensations—hadn't any direct link to noise and could be exquisite in whispers. We slept, embracing, and awoke before morning, hungry again after deep satisfaction.

"You love me more," she said, murmuring in my ear.

"I loved you always."

Before seven she went decorously down to her own room, and Litsi and I were already drinking coffee in the morning room when she reappeared, dressed in fresh blues and greens. She fetched juice and cereal and made me some toast, and Litsi watched us with speculation and finally enlightenment.

"Congratulations," he said to me dryly.

"The wedding," Danielle said, "will take place."

"So I gathered."

He and I, a while later, went up to see Roland de Brescou, to give him and the princess the completed contracts.

"I was sure," Roland said weakly, "that Nanterre wouldn't agree to dissolve the company. Without it he can't possibly make guns, can he?"

"If ever he does," I said, "your name won't be linked with it."

"How did you persuade him, Kit?" the princess asked.

"Um . . . tied him in knots."

She gave me a brief glance. "Then I'd better not ask."

When I left Roland's sitting room, she followed me downstairs. "No thanks are enough. How *can* we thank you?" she asked.

"You don't need to. And . . . um . . . Danielle and I will marry in June."

"I'm very pleased indeed," she said with evident pleasure, and kissed me warmly on both cheeks.

"I'm so sorry about your horses," I said.

"Yes. . . . When you talk to Wykeham, ask him to start looking about for replacements. We can't expect another Cotopaxi, but next year, perhaps, a runner anyway in the Grand National. And don't forget, next week at Cheltenham we still have Kinley."

"The Triumph Hurdle," I said.

I went to Folkestone races by train later that morning, with a light heart but without Danielle, who had a dentist's appointment.

I rode four races and won two, and felt carefree for the first time in weeks. It was a tremendous feeling while it lasted.

Bunty Ireland, the *Towncrier*'s racing correspondent, gave me a large envelope from Lord Vaughnley. "Hot off the computers," he said. I thanked him and, reflecting that I didn't need the contents anymore, took it unopened back to London with me.

Dinner that evening was practically festive, although Danielle wasn't there, having driven herself to work in her car. Beatrice had decided to return to Palm Beach the next day. The princess had apparently told her that Nanterre's case was lost, which had subdued her amazingly.

Roland had joined us at dinner and offered champagne, raising his glass to Litsi and to me in a toast. Beatrice scowled a little but blossomed like a sunflower when Roland said that perhaps, with all the extra capital generated by the sale of the business, he might consider increasing her trust fund. Too forgiving, I thought, yet without her we would very likely not have prevailed.

Roland, the princess and Beatrice retired fairly early, leaving Litsi and me in the sitting room. Quite late I remembered Lord Vaughnley's envelope, which I'd put down on a side table. Litsi watched me open it and draw out the contents: one glossy black-and-white photograph and one short newspaper clipping. Also a brief compliments slip: "Regret nothing more on Nanterre."

The picture showed Nanterre in evening dress, surrounded by other people similarly clad, on the deck of a yacht. I handed it to Litsi and read the accompanying clipping.

> Arms dealer Ahmed Fuad's fiftieth-birthday bash, held on his yacht *Felissima* in Monte Carlo Harbor on Friday evening, drew guests from as far as California, Peru, and Darwin, Australia.

Litsi passed back the photograph, and I turned it over, reading the flimsy information strip stuck to the back: a list of names and the date. "That's odd," I said blankly. "That party was held last Friday night."

"What of it? Nanterre must have jetted out there and back, like the others."

"On Friday night Col was shot."

Litsi stared at me.

"Nanterre couldn't have done it," I said. "He was in Monte Carlo."

"But he said he did. He boasted of it to Beatrice."

I frowned. "Yes, he did."

"He must have got someone else to do it," Litsi said.

I shook my head. "He did everything himself. Threatened the princess, chased Danielle, set the trap for you, came to put the bomb in my car. He didn't trust any of that to anyone else. He knows about horses. He would have shot Col, but he didn't."

"He confessed to all the horses," Litsi insisted.

"Yes, but suppose he read about them in the papers. He wanted ways to frighten Monsieur de Brescou and the princess. Suppose he *said* he'd killed them, when he hadn't?"

"But in that case," Litsi said blankly, "who did? Who would want to kill her best horses, if not Nanterre?"

I rose slowly to my feet.

"What's the matter?" Litsi said, alarmed. "You've gone as white as snow."

"He killed," I said with a dry mouth, "the horse I might have won the Grand National on. The horse on which I might have won the Gold Cup. There's only one person who hates me enough to do that. Who couldn't bear to see me win those races. . . ." I felt breathless and dizzy.

"Sit down," Litsi said.

"Kinley," I said, and went jerkily to the telephone and got through to Wykeham. "Did you stop the dog patrols?" I demanded.

"Yes, of course. You told me this morning there was no more need for them."

"I think I was wrong. I'm coming down to your stables now, tonight, and we'll get the dog patrols back again for tomorrow and every day until Cheltenham. Where's Kinley tonight?"

"Back in his own box, of course. You said the danger was past."

"We'll move him back into the corner box when I get there."

"Kit, no. Not in the middle of the night."

"You want to keep him safe," I said, and there was no arguing with that.

We disconnected, and Litsi said slowly, "Do you mean Maynard Allardeck?"

"Yes, I do. He found out, about two weeks ago, that he'll never get a knighthood, because I sent the film I made of him to the honors department. He's wanted that knighthood since he was a child, when he told my grandfather that one day the Fieldings would have to bow down to him, because he'd be a lord. He knows horses better than Nanterre. He was brought up in his father's racing stable and was his assistant trainer for years. He saw Cascade and Cotopaxi at Newbury, and they were distinctive horses. And Col at Ascot—unmistakable."

I went to the door.

"I'll come with you," Litsi said.

I shook my head. "You'd be up all night."

"Get going," he said. "You saved my family's honor. Let me pay some of their debt."

I was grateful, indeed, for the company. We drove to Sussex in the Mercedes, and I telephoned Danielle on the way to tell her where we were going. "We'll be back for breakfast," I said. "Sleep well."

In time we came to Wykeham's village.

"What are you going to do here?" Litsi asked.

I shrugged. "Walk round the stables." I explained about the many little courtyards. "It's not an easy place to patrol."

"You do seriously think Allardeck will risk trying to kill another of Aunt Casilia's horses?"

"Yes. Kinley, her brilliant hurdler. I'm not taking chances."

I turned into Wykeham's driveway and stopped the car in the parking area. We stepped out into the silence of midnight under a clear sky sparkling with diamondlike stars. I took a deep breath of its peace, and heard in the quiet distance a dull, thudding explosion.

Dear God, I thought. *We're too late.*

I ran. I knew where. To the last courtyard, the one nearest to Wykeham's house. Ran with the furies at my heels, my mind a jumble of fear. Kinley was dead, and I'd killed him.

I ran into the courtyard and saw Wykeham lying on the path outside the doors of the boxes.

Two doors were open, the boxes dimly lit by the light outside in the courtyard. In one box I could see a horse lying on its side, its legs still jerking in convulsive death throes.

While I was still yards away I saw Wykeham struggle to his feet and go into the other box, his feet silent on the peat.

I ran.

I saw another, taller man in the box, grabbing a horse by its halter. I saw Wykeham pick something up from the windowsill and put the thing against the second man's head. I saw the tiny flash, heard the awful bang. . . .

When I reached the door, there was a dead man on the peat, a live horse tossing his head and snorting in fright, a smell of burning powder, and Wykeham standing with the humane killer in his hands.

The live horse was Kinley.

"Wykeham!" I said.

He turned his head, looked at me vaguely. "He shot my horses. I killed him. I said I would . . . and I have."

I looked down at the dead man, at the beautiful suit and the hand-sewn shoes. He was lying half on his face, and he had a nylon stocking pulled over his head as a mask, with a hole in it behind his right ear.

Litsi ran into the courtyard, calling breathlessly. I turned in the box doorway, obstructing his view. "Litsi," I said, "call the police. Use the telephone in the car. Tell them a man has been killed in an accident."

"A man!" he exclaimed. "Not a horse?"

"Both, but tell them a man."

"Right." He went back, and I turned toward Wykeham, who was wide-eyed now, and beginning to tremble.

"It wasn't an accident," he said, with pride somewhere in the tone of his voice. "I killed him."

"Wykeham," I said urgently, "listen. Are you listening?"

"Yes."

"Where do you want to spend your last years, in prison or out on the Downs with your horses?"

He stared.

"There'll be an inquest," I said. "And this was an *accident*. Listen. You came out to see if all was well before you went to bed."

"Yes, I did."

"You'd found three horses killed in the last ten days. The police didn't know who did it. You knew I was coming down to help patrol the yards tonight, but you were naturally worried. You came into this courtyard, and you heard someone shoot one of your horses. Is it Abseil?" I longed for him to say no, but he said, "Yes."

Abseil, racing at breakneck speed over the last three fences at Sandown, clinging to victory right to the post.

I said, "You ran across to try to stop the intruder from doing any more damage. You tried to pull the humane killer out of his hands. He was younger and stronger and taller than you. He knocked you down with the humane killer. You fell on the path, momentarily stunned."

"How do you know?" Wykeham asked, bewildered.

"The marks of the barrel are all down your cheek. Don't touch it," I said as he raised a hand to feel. "He knocked you down and went into the second box to kill a second horse."

"Yes, to kill Kinley."

"Listen. He had the humane killer in his hand."

Wykeham began to shake his head, and then stopped.

I said, "The man was going to shoot your horse. You grabbed at the gun to stop him. He tried to pull it back from your grasp. In the struggle, when he jerked the gun toward him, the thick barrel hit his head, and the jerk also caused you somehow to pull the trigger. You did *not* mean to kill him. You meant to stop him from shooting your horse."

"K-Kit . . ." he said, finally stuttering.

"What are you going to tell the police?"

"I t-tried to s-stop him from shooting." He swallowed. "He jerked the gun . . . against his head. . . . It w-went off."

He was still holding the gun by its rough wooden butt.

"Throw it down on the peat," I said.

He did so. We both looked at it—a heavy, ugly, clumsy instrument of death. On the windowsill were small bright golden caps full of gunpowder. One cocked the gun, fed in the cap, pulled the trigger. The gunpowder exploded and shot out the bolt.

Litsi came back, saying the police would be coming, and it was he who switched the light on, revealing every detail of the scene.

I bent down and took a closer look at Maynard's head. There was oil on the nylon stocking where the bolt had gone through, and I remembered Robin Curtiss saying the bolt had been oiled before Col . . . Robin would remember. There would be no doubt that Maynard had killed all four horses.

"Do you know who it is?" I said to Wykeham, straightening up.

He half knew, half couldn't believe it.

"Allardeck?" he said, unconvinced.

"Allardeck." The feud was dead. Finally over. The long obsession had died with Maynard, and he had been dead before he hit the peat, like Cascade and Cotopaxi, Abseil and Col.

A fitting end, I thought.

Litsi went off to the parking area to meet the police.

Wykeham spent a long while looking at Kinley. "Mind you win the Triumph Hurdle," he said fiercely.

I thought of the schooling sessions I'd done with that horse, teaching him distances on the Downs with Wykeham watching, shaping the glorious natural talent into accomplished experience.

I would do my best, I said.

He smiled. "Thank you, Kit," he said. "For everything."

The police came with Litsi. They took Wykeham through what had happened.

"I came out . . . found the intruder. He shot my horse." Wykeham's voice shook. "I fought with him. He knocked me down. He was going to shoot this horse also. I got to my feet. . . ."

He paused.

"Yes, sir?" one of the policemen said, not unsympathetically.

They saw—standing before them on the peat inside the box, standing beside a dead intruder, with the intruder's deadly weapon shining with menace in the light—they saw an old, thin man with disheveled white hair, with the dark freckles of age on his ancient forehead, with pistol marks on his cheek.

They saw, as the coroner would see, and the lawyers, the shaking, deteriorating exterior, not the titan who still lived inside.

Wykeham looked at Kinley, at the future, at the horse that could fly on the Downs, tail streaming, jumping like an angel to his destiny.

He looked at the policemen, and his eyes seemed full of sky.

"It was an accident," he said.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

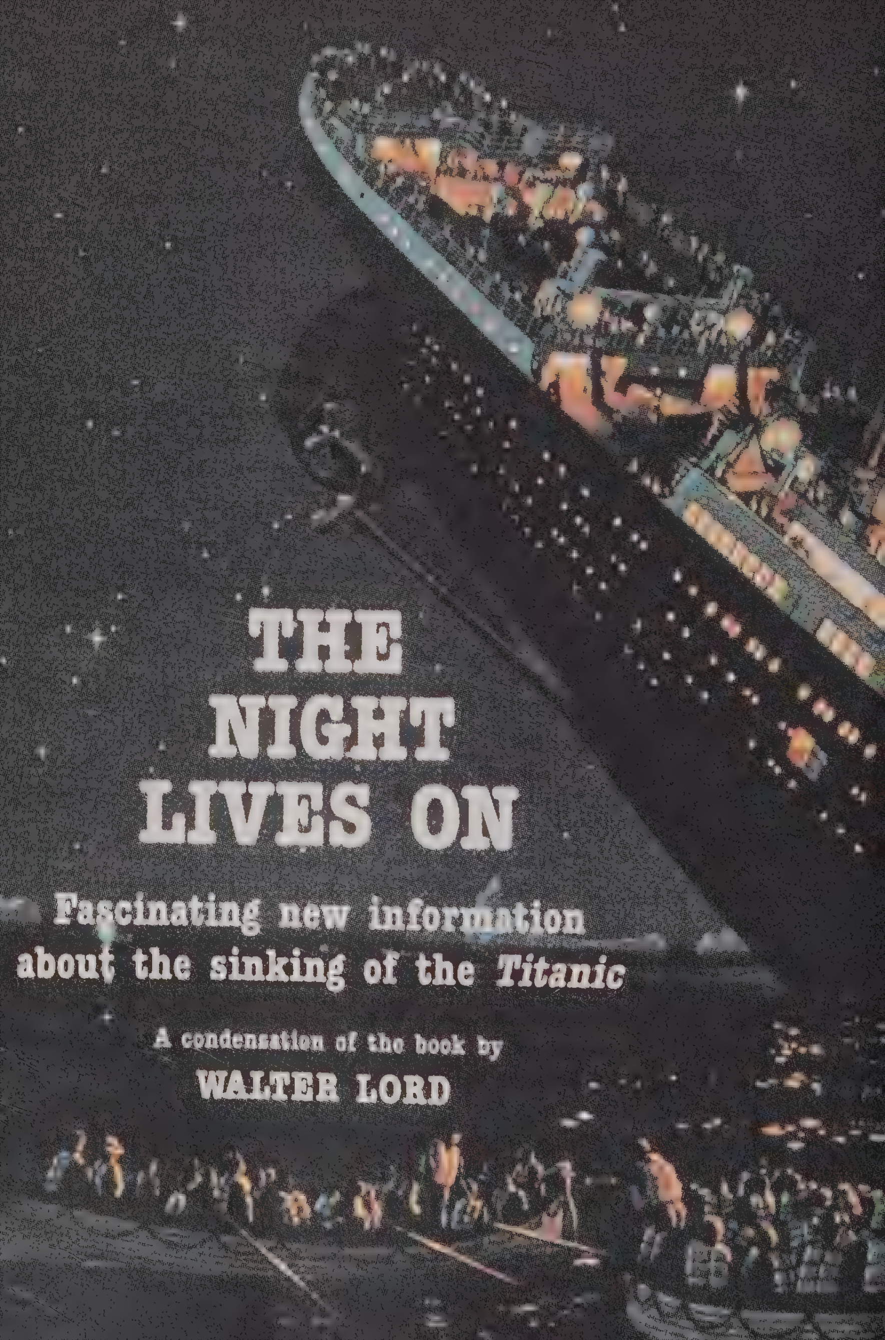
Bolt is a special cause for celebration, as it is Dick Francis' twenty-fifth novel. The Welsh-born writer has been averaging a new book every year since 1962, and at last count he had sold over twenty million copies in nearly two dozen languages.

Francis, as his many loyal readers know, had been one of Great Britain's top steeplechase jockeys until a bad fall forced him to retire in 1957. Soon after, he became a racing columnist for the London *Sunday Express*, but as he explains with a smile, "I needed more money. The carpets were threadbare, we had two sons to educate, and my wife, Mary, said to me, 'You always wanted to write a novel, so now is the time!' "

Dick Francis

Today the best-selling author and his wife live most of the year in Fort Lauderdale, Florida—near the Hialeah racetrack, of course. After starting off each morning with an early swim or a stroll along the beach, Francis maintains a rigorous writing schedule. Although he says it is difficult to get started on a book, once he puts pen to paper he is a true master of his craft. His plots are thoroughly worked out beforehand, and each centers on a crime or event that he calls the "dirty deed." He gets to know his characters intimately—"as well as I know my own family"—and he always identifies closely with his heroes. "I try to give them characteristics I'd be proud to have myself. But, of course, they're usually tougher and more courageous than I am."

Kit Fielding, the resourceful hero of *Bolt*, also appeared in *Break In*, a previous Condensed Books selection. Francis rarely uses the same character twice, but he says he became particularly fond of Kit. "He was a happy person, and I was happy writing about him." Perhaps that means we'll be treated to another Kit Fielding adventure before long.

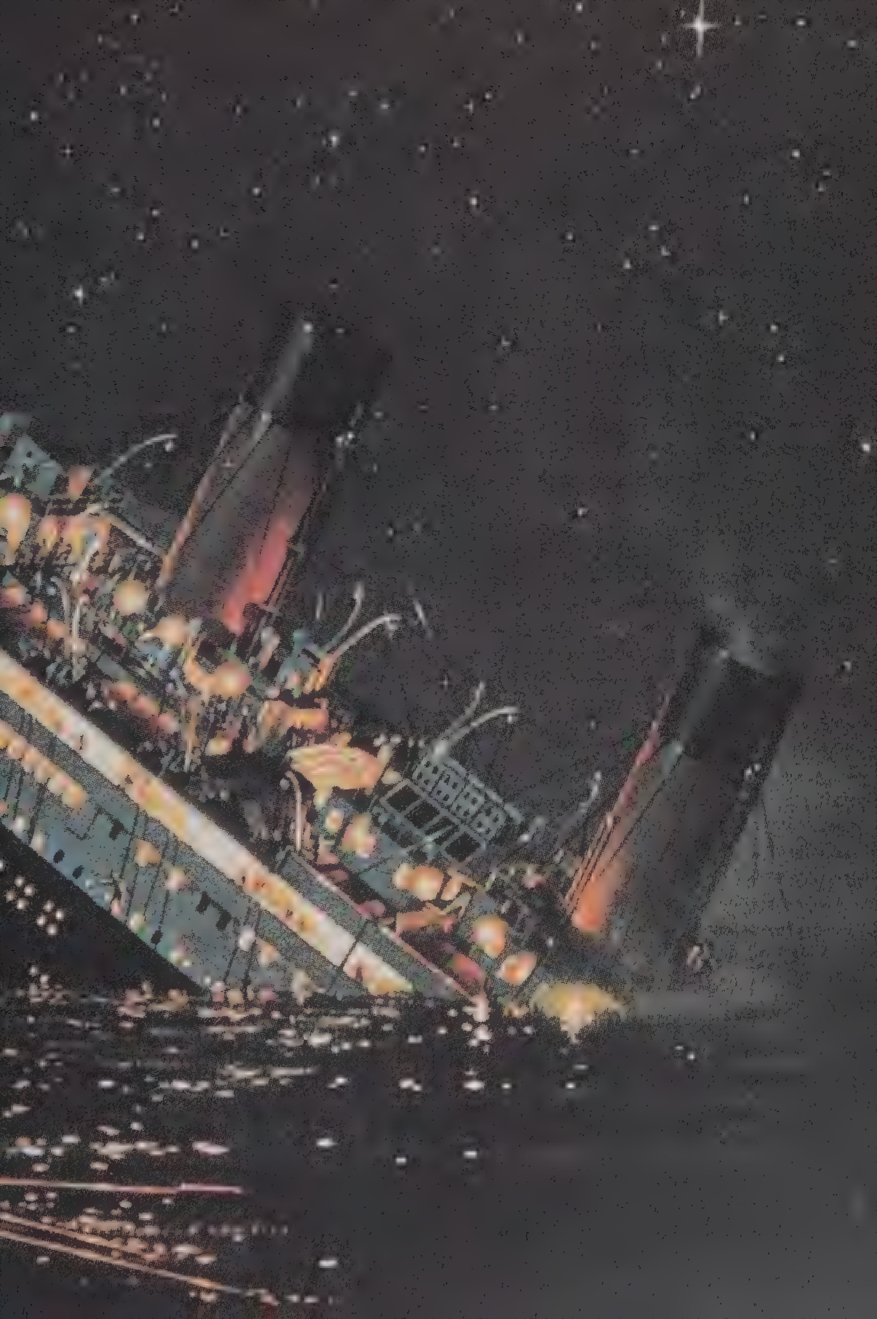


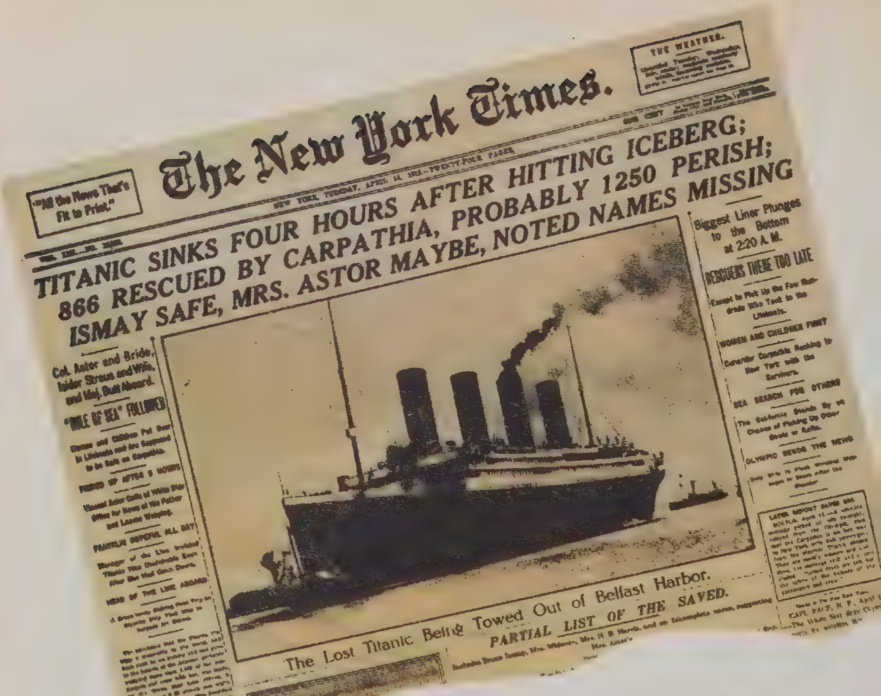
THE NIGHT LIVES ON

Fascinating new information about the sinking of the *Titanic*

A condensation of the book by

WALTER LORD





"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 1912—TWENTY-FOUR PAGES

ONE CENT

TITANIC SINKS FOUR HOURS AFTER HITTING ICEBERG;
866 RESCUED BY CARPATHIA, PROBABLY 1250 PERISH;
ISMAY SAFE, MRS. ASTOR MAYBE, NOTED NAMES MISSING

Col. Astor and Bride, Isidor Straus and Wife, and Maj. Butt Aboard.

"RULE OF SEA" FOLLOWED

Biggest Liner Plunges to the Bottom at 2:20 A.M.

RESCUERS THERE TOO LATE

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

SEA SEARCH FOR OTHERS

OLYMPIC SENDS THE NEWS

The Lost Titanic Being Towed Out of Belfast Harbor.

PARTIAL LIST OF THE SAVED.

It was one of the great news stories of all time. And today, seventy-five years later, the *Titanic*, its passengers and its disastrous fate continue to fascinate us. Inspired by the recent discovery of the "unsinkable" ship, expert Walter Lord reveals dramatic new details about that tragic night—the horror and the heroism, the fear and the folly, the haunting might-have-beens. . . .

Unsinkable Subject

Just twenty minutes short of midnight, April 14, 1912, the great new White Star liner *Titanic*, making her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York, had a rendezvous with ice in the calm, dark waters of the North Atlantic. She brushed the berg so gently that many on board didn't notice it, but so lethally that she was instantly doomed.

By midnight Captain Edward J. Smith knew the worst and ordered the lifeboats filled and lowered. There were distressingly few of these, enough for only half of the ship's company. The rule was, of course, Women and children first. At 12:15 a.m. the *Titanic* sent her first distress call. At 12:45 she began firing rockets, for there was a light on the horizon, tantalizingly near. The light remained motionless.

On the *Titanic*, the bellboys—lads of fourteen or fifteen—brought up loaves of bread for the lifeboats, now dropping one after another into the sea. Far below, the engineers kept the lights burning; topside, the band played cheerful music on the boat deck. The ship was noticeably down at the bow.

At 1:10, as boat 1 pulled away, the water lapped the portholes just under the ship's name. Thirty minutes later, as life raft collapsible C rowed off, the name had vanished into the sea and the forward well deck was awash. The band still played.

By 2:05 the last boat had been launched, leaving sixteen hundred people stranded on the sloping decks. Richard N. Williams II, a nineteen-year-old first-class passenger, wandered into the main companionway on A deck and watched the water creeping up the grand staircase. The lights still burned, now with a reddish glow. The band probably played on, but no one is sure.

At 2:17 the *Titanic* slowly, almost majestically, stood on end. The lights blinked once and went out forever. Then came a thundering roar as everything movable within the ship broke loose and plunged downward. At 2:20 she settled back slightly and slipped beneath the sea. Over fifteen hundred people were lost in this, one of the greatest maritime disasters in history.

Understandably, the sinking of the *Titanic* was a sensation at the time. The morning after the rescue ship, *Carpathia*, reached New York with her pitiful load of 705 survivors, *The New York Times* devoted its first twelve pages to the story. But a single letter in the Library of Congress gives a more vivid picture of the universal shock and grief than any number of newspaper pages. The letter is from a young naval officer, Alexander Macomb, to his mother. It is dated April 16, 1912.

> The terrible news about the *Titanic* reached New York about eleven o'clock last night, and the scene on Broadway was awful. Crowds of people were coming out of the theaters, cafés were going full tilt, when the newsboys began to cry, "Extra! Extra! *Titanic* sunk with eighteen hundred aboard!" You can't imagine the effect of those words on the crowd. The excitement was almost enough to cause a panic in the theaters. Women began to faint and weep, and scores of people in evening clothes jumped into taxis and rushed to the offices of the White Star Line, where they remained all night waiting for news. . . .

Understandable then, but there have been massive changes in the world since 1912. We don't even cross the ocean the same way now, and two great wars have numbed us to casualty lists. Compared to the implications of a nuclear confrontation, the figures of souls lost in a shipwreck—any shipwreck—seem almost quaint. One might suppose that people would no longer be gripped by the *Titanic*. Not so. The discovery of her hulk in September 1985 created a wave of excitement that seemed in sharp contrast to the silent gray ghost resting so peacefully on the ocean floor.

Indeed, there seems no limit to the public's fascination. In America every survivor now rates an obituary in *The New York Times*. Typical was the case of ninety-year-old Ethel Beane, who died in Rochester, New York, in 1983. She had lived an utterly uneventful life. She hadn't even told her *Titanic* experiences for seventy-one years. But she was nevertheless newsworthy—simply by being a survivor.

In London, *The Times* recently reported that a Los Angeles businessman planned to build three replicas of the *Titanic* for 1.5 billion dollars. Each would accommodate six hundred passengers at a thousand dollars a day. Preposterous? Nevertheless, *The Times* featured the story on the front page. The editor knew that the *Titanic* is always news.

Over the years, the ship has become an enduring favorite on stage and screen. She has been the locale for five major motion pictures and played an important part in many others. On television she played a crucial role in *Upstairs, Downstairs*, the memorable English series about the Bellamy family. Going down with the ship, Lady Marjorie Bellamy joined Edward and Edith of Noel Coward's *Cavalcade* as probably the most famous of all the fictional victims of the disaster.

Not surprisingly, the *Titanic* has also become a great favorite with political cartoonists. She is completely nonpartisan. Since 1976 she has been used to depict the troubles of Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan. In British cartoons both the ship and the iceberg have represented Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

What is the hold of this long-lost liner? First of all, the *Titanic* must surely be one of the greatest news stories of modern times: the biggest ship in the world, proclaimed unsinkable, hits an iceberg on her maiden voyage and goes down, taking with her many of the best-known celebrities of the day.

Add to that glamour all those if onlys—if only she had paid more attention to the warnings she received . . . if only she had sighted the ice a few seconds sooner . . . if only there had been enough lifeboats . . . if only that ship on the horizon had come . . . if only, if only.

The story has something for everyone. For nautical enthusiasts, it is the ultimate shipwreck. For moralists, there are all those sermons on overconfidence and self-sacrifice. For mystics, there is presidential aide Archie Butt's strangely foreboding letter assuring his sister-in-law, "If the old ship goes down, you'll find my affairs in shipshape condition."

The *Titanic* is also a trivia lover's dream. What was the name of John Jacob Astor's dog? Kitty. Who led the band? Wallace Hartley. Which smokestack was the dummy? The fourth.

Above all, the *Titanic* entrances the social historian. She is such an exquisite microcosm of a world still dominated by Edwardian values, illuminating so perfectly the class distinctions that prevailed at the time. These distinctions remained sacred even as the ship was going down. One prominent passenger later complained that more first-class men might have been saved if only steerage passengers hadn't taken up so much room in what he called the first-class boats. It never occurred to him that the lifeboats, wherever located, might have been for everyone.

There were all too few boats anyhow, leading to a clash between two basic Edwardian rules of conduct. Should normal class precedence prevail, or the rule of "women and children"? The latter won out officially, but there were cases of both that night.

The *Titanic* also gives a fascinating picture of post-Edwardian life at its more rarefied level. The damage claim filed by Mrs. Charlotte Cardeza of Philadelphia lists fourteen trunks, four suitcases, three crates, and a medicine chest. Among other things, they contained seventy dresses, ten fur coats, thirty-eight large feather pieces, twenty-two hatpins to keep them in place, ninety-one pairs of gloves, and innumerable trifles to amuse her, like a Swiss music box in the shape of a bird.

Yet none of this is enough to explain the *Titanic*'s current grip on the public. For over forty years after the disaster, the ship lay more or less in limbo. Then *A Night to Remember* appeared in 1955. It awakened some curiosity but certainly not enough to account for the *Titanic*'s continuing appeal.

The fact is that America is currently on a nostalgia binge. The *Titanic* has come to stand for a world of tranquillity and civility that we have somehow lost. Today life is hectic, prices are climbing, quality is falling, violence is everywhere. In contrast, 1912 looks awfully good—a happier world, where a shoulder of lamb cost sixteen cents a pound, where people were still sure the world's wrongs could be righted. The *Titanic* symbolizes that era or, more poignantly, the end of it. The worse things get today, the more we think of her and all that went down with her.

Legendary from the Start

THE building of the *Titanic* has created almost as many legends as her sinking. Not long after *A Night to Remember* was published, several letters arrived from Ireland explaining the "real" reason why the ship sank. The trouble could be traced, these letters said, to the official number—3909 04—given the *Titanic* by the Ulstermen who built her. Held up to a mirror, these figures spell NO POPE. True enough, provided one fudges the 4 a little.

But a quick check of the records destroys the theory. The yard number assigned to the *Titanic* by her Belfast builders, Harland & Wolff, was 401, and her Board of Trade number was 131,428. Viewed in a mirror, neither number says anything at all.

Then there is the legend that the *Titanic* was advertised as unsinkable. Actually, the White Star ads never made such a claim about either the *Titanic* or her sister ship, *Olympic*. All promotion almost invariably used the simple slogan, Largest and finest steamers in the world.

However, on June 1, 1911, the day after she was launched, the *Irish News and Belfast Morning News* ran a detailed account of the *Titanic*'s sixteen watertight compartments and their connecting doors. "In the event of an accident, the captain can, by simply moving an electric switch, instantly close the doors throughout, practically making the vessel unsinkable."

"We place absolute confidence in the *Titanic*. We believe that the boat is unsinkable," declared a vice president of the White Star Line in New York as the first alarming reports drifted in around 8:00 a.m. on April 15. The *Titanic* could certainly float two or three days, he elaborated around noon. Other experts seemed to agree, declaring that it was practically impossible for the *Titanic* to sink, because her fifteen bulkheads would keep her afloat indefinitely. Actually, the *Titanic* had by then been at the bottom of the sea a good nine hours.

How close to unsinkable really was the *Titanic?* Did she embody the latest engineering techniques? The answer is no. Far from being a triumph of safe construction, the *Titanic* was the product of a trend that for fifty years had seen one safety feature after another sacrificed for competitive reasons.

In 1858 a ship had been built that really did come close to being unsinkable. This was the *Great Eastern*, a mammoth liner of nineteen thousand tons and nearly seven hundred feet in length.

The *Great Eastern* was really two ships in one. Inside her outer hull was a wholly separate inner hull, the two joined by a network of braces. Like the *Titanic*, she was divided into sixteen watertight compartments by fifteen transverse bulkheads, but on the *Great Eastern* the bulkheads ran higher and had no doors. A honeycomb of walls and decks actually gave her a total of some forty to fifty separate watertight compartments.

On the night of August 27, 1862, the *Great Eastern* was off Montauk Point, Long Island, when she scraped an uncharted rock, ripping a gash in her outer skin eighty-three feet long and nine feet wide. Considering her size, the hole was comparable to the damage that sank the *Titanic*.

But the *Great Eastern* did not go down. She sagged to starboard, the inner skin held, and the engine rooms remained dry. Next morning she limped into New York harbor under her own steam, carrying her 820 passengers to safety.

Her survival was a tribute to the engineering genius of her builder, Isambard Kingdom Brunel—and to the mood of the times. The mechanical engineer was the Western world's new hero—and no wonder. Until twenty years before the building of the *Great Eastern*, the only way to cross the Atlantic was by sailing packet. Slow, cramped, and unpredictable, the trip could take a month. Then, almost overnight it seemed, came the floating "teakettles." With pistons hissing and clanking, tall chimneys belching smoke and sparks, paddle wheels thrashing the waves, they quickly cut the trip to less than ten days. The engineers who wrought this miracle were deferred to on every question involving design and construction. If Brunel wanted his leviathan to be the best in every way—size, speed, strength, and safety—that was the way it would be, regardless of cost.

But the engineers did not have the last word for very long. The speed and reliability of the new steamships meant a great surge in transatlantic travel, with profits further fattened by the growing emigrant trade and generous mail contracts. The stakes were high, and by 1873 eleven major lines were fighting for their share. Now the perfect ship was the ship that made the most money.

Passengers demanded attention; stewards could serve them more easily if doors were cut in the watertight bulkheads. A grand staircase required a spacious opening at every level; a watertight deck was no longer possible. A double hull ate up valuable passenger and cargo space; a double bottom would be enough.

One by one, safety precautions were chipped away in the interests of a more competitive ship. When the "unsinkable" *Titanic* entered service in 1912, she matched the *Great Eastern* in only one respect: she too had fifteen transverse watertight bulkheads.

But even this was misleading. The *Great Eastern*'s bulkheads were carried thirty feet above the waterline, the *Titanic*'s bulkheads only ten feet. Even her system of watertight doors that could be closed from the bridge "by simply moving a switch" fell short of its promise. Only twelve doors at the very bottom of the ship could be closed this way. The rest had to be closed by hand. On the night of the collision some were closed; some weren't.

Why, then, was such a vulnerable ship considered by the owners themselves to be virtually unsinkable? Partly it was because the *Titanic* would indeed float with any two compartments flooded, and the White Star Line couldn't imagine anything worse than a collision at the juncture of two compartments. But there was another reason too: the ship *looked* so safe. Her huge bulk, her tiers of decks rising one atop the other, her twenty-nine boilers, her luxurious fittings—all seemed to spell permanence. The appearance of safety was mistaken for safety itself.

The *Titanic* was a magnificent sight on April 2, 1912, as she left Belfast for Southampton, England, where she would begin her service on the North Atlantic run. At 46,328 tons, she was the largest ship in the world—only a trifle bigger than her sister ship, *Olympic*, but fifty percent larger than any other liner afloat.

To give the new ship a little extra glamour, White Star installed twenty-eight splendid staterooms on B deck, complete with large windows—not portholes—that looked out on the sea. Most of these rooms were interconnecting and could be turned into suites of any size. Each was painstakingly decorated in a different period style—Louis XVI, Early Dutch, Regency, and so on.

The second innovation was even more arresting. A section of the second-class promenade deck was appropriated for a dazzling new first-class attraction: a genuine French sidewalk café, complete with genuine French waiters.

As the *Titanic* prepared to sail on her maiden voyage April 10 the Café Parisien and the new special staterooms stamped her as the most luxurious ship on the Atlantic.

Had Ships Gotten Too Big for Captain Smith?

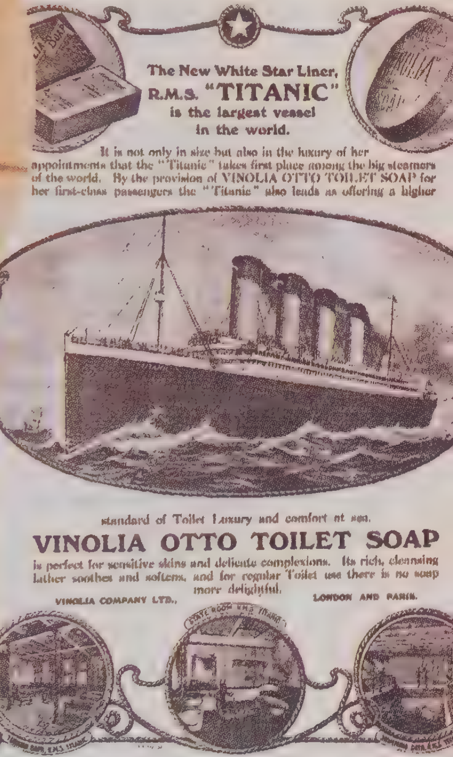
THE White Star Line made very little of the *Titanic*'s departure. There were no bands, no speeches, no flag-waving. The only touch out of the ordinary was an immense crowd. Southampton was a seafaring town, and it seemed that the whole city wanted to watch the great ship start off on her maiden voyage.

Assisted by six tugs, she slowly crept out of the slip and into the channel, maneuvering toward open water and ultimately the sea. As she moved down the channel, now under her own power, the *Titanic* came abreast of two smaller liners moored side by side to the quay on the left. These were the White Star's *Oceanic* and the American Line's *New York*, idled by a coal strike that had paralyzed most of British shipping for weeks.

As the *Titanic* drew opposite the *New York* there was a sudden series of sharp cracks as, one after another, all six of the lines tying the *New York* to the *Oceanic* snapped. Drawn by some inexorable force, the American liner began drifting toward the huge *Titanic*. Collision seemed certain as the stern of the *New York* swung to within three or four feet of the port quarter of the *Titanic*.

Quick thinking saved the day. The tug *Vulcan*, one of the small fleet escorting the *Titanic*, darted to the danger spot. Her skipper passed a line to the *New York*'s stern, and the *Vulcan* managed to slow the vessel's drift. At the same time, Captain Smith on the *Titanic*'s bridge nudged his port engine forward, creating a wash that helped push the *New York* clear. The American liner slid at

Left: Captain Edward J. Smith, who planned to retire after the Titanic's *maiden voyage*



The New White Star Liner,
R.M.S. "TITANIC"
is the largest vessel
in the world.

It is not only in size but also in the luxury of her appointments that the "Titanic" takes first place among the big steamers of the world. By the provision of VINOLIA OTTO TOILET SOAP for her first-class passengers the "Titanic" also leads as offering a higher standard of Toilet Luxury and comfort at sea.

VINOLIA OTTO TOILET SOAP

is perfect for sensitive skins and delicate complexions. Its rich, cleansing lather soothes and softens, and for regular Toilet use there is no soap more delightful.

VINOLIA COMPANY LTD., LONDON AND PARIS.

Right: Advertisement for the soap used by first-class passengers on the Titanic

Below: The Titanic *narrowly escapes collision as she leaves Southampton on April 10.*

an angle down the narrow corridor of water between the *Titanic* and the *Oceanic* with only inches to spare. Miraculously, there was no contact, and the errant *New York* was towed safely away.

Covering the near collision, the editors of the *Southampton Times and Hampshire Gazette* didn't know why it had happened. But of one thing they were sure—it was not a case of bad ship handling by Captain Smith of the *Titanic:* "From the moment she began to move from her berth she was under absolute control."

It was only natural to rush to Captain Smith's support. He was at the pinnacle of a brilliant career. Going to sea as an apprentice on a clipper ship in 1869, he gradually worked his way up the ladder, joining White Star in 1880 as fourth officer on the old *Celtic*. By 1887 he was captain of the *Republic*, and since then he had commanded no fewer than seventeen White Star vessels.

All the time, he honed the qualities that made the transatlantic captain such a unique breed. He was a superb seaman. A big man, gray-bearded and barrel-chested, he was a firm disciplinarian but fair and popular with his crews. He was extremely soft-spoken, rarely raised his voice, and smiled easily. His whole appeal was low-key. Bringing the *Adriatic* over on her maiden voyage in 1907, he told the New York press:

> "When anyone asks me how I can best describe my experiences of nearly forty years at sea, I merely say, 'Uneventful.' I have never been in an accident of any sort worth speaking about. Nor was I ever in any predicament that threatened to end in disaster."

"Uneventful" paid off. Captain Smith had been the obvious choice to command the great new *Olympic* when she entered service in 1911. But she was nearly twice as big as any ship he had handled before, and a disturbing lesson in the difficulty of managing a steamer of the *Olympic*'s unprecedented size occurred in September. As the *Olympic* began her fifth voyage to New York, she fell in with the Royal Navy cruiser *Hawke* in the narrow channel of a tricky body of water off the Isle of Wight. The *Olympic* had seven times the tonnage of the *Hawke* and was nearly three times as long.

The two vessels were going in roughly the same direction, only two hundred yards apart. Both were moving at about fifteen knots, with the *Hawke* at first overhauling the *Olympic*, then beginning to drop behind as the liner opened up her speed.

Suddenly, without warning, the *Hawke* veered hard to port and headed straight for the *Olympic*'s starboard quarter. There was a crash like a thunderclap as the cruiser rammed the liner's hull. No one was killed, but the *Hawke*'s bow was badly crumpled and the *Olympic* received a double gash toward the stern, flooding two compartments. Her passengers were taken off by tender, and the liner limped back to Southampton.

The *Olympic*'s passengers, interviewed by the press, were almost unanimous in declaring that the *Hawke* suddenly and for no apparent reason turned and rammed their ship. The *Hawke*'s captain, some said, must have been crazy. As for Captain Smith, all agreed that he was the best on the Atlantic.

The case went to court, where the Admiralty came up with a startling defense. Bolstered by experts who had experimented with small models in tanks, the Admiralty argued that far from being the transgressor, the *Hawke* had been helplessly drawn into the side of the *Olympic* by hydrodynamic forces over which she had no control. When a ship's hull is moving forward, the experts explained, it pushes out on either side a large amount of water, which then surges back into the vessel's wake, sucking in any smaller object that happens to be afloat nearby. The pull increases with the size, speed, and proximity of the larger moving hull. Here the pull was irresistible. The 45,000-ton *Olympic* was much too close, considering the speed she was making as she began drawing ahead of the 7500-ton *Hawke*.

The court listened and was convinced. The *Hawke* was cleared and the *Olympic* held to blame for the collision.

"Thoroughly unsatisfactory" was the reaction of *Nautical Magazine*. The editors were especially indignant about the experts' use of models to prove the hydrodynamic forces at work. How could toys in a tank prove anything about two vessels weighing thousands of tons in the actual sea? "When all is said, the practical seaman will dismiss these model experiments as useless. . . ."

The White Star Line evidently agreed. Instead of showing displeasure about Captain Smith's performance, they promoted him. Early in 1912 Captain Smith was named to command the new and even bigger *Titanic*, flagship of the fleet. He would take her over and back on her maiden voyage, and then retire. He was now fifty-nine years old, and this would be a way of thanking him for his years of loyal service.

Sailing day, and the *Titanic*'s near collision with the *New York* showed that Captain Smith too had rejected the court's reasoning in the *Olympic-Hawke* case. After all, the two incidents were almost identical: the same captain, the same pilot, the same interaction of hulls, the same result. If Captain Smith had believed the suction theory, he would hardly have let it happen twice.

A nagging question remained: How much else was there to learn about these huge new liners? Until 1911 Smith's ships had been less than five hundred feet long; the *Olympic* and *Titanic* were nearly nine hundred feet. Did he fully appreciate the difference? Did he realize how much longer it would take to stop a 46,000-ton ship going twenty-two knots? Or how much wider her turning circle would be?

Certainly the *Titanic*'s trial runs could not have been very helpful. They took up only half a day in Belfast Lough. The *Titanic* simply steamed a few miles, made some twists and turns, then went back to Belfast to put the Harland & Wolff technicians ashore. This done, she headed for Southampton to begin her regular service.

Captain Smith too seems to have felt that something more was needed. He did a surprising thing as the *Titanic*, after a brief stop at Cherbourg, steamed toward Queenstown, Ireland, early on the morning of April 11 to take on hundreds of Irish emigrants. The *Titanic* began practicing turns, leaving a wake of lazy S's, as Captain Smith continued to educate himself on the ways of his immense new command.

"Our Coterie"

As the *Titanic* headed out to sea, and the green hills of Ireland faded into the dusk astern, her first-class passengers busied themselves with the ritual that invariably opened every Atlantic voyage: they studied the passenger list, looking for old friends or familiar names that might be worth cultivating.

Like stars in a Broadway production, the big names were all there: the Astors, of course, along with the Wideners, Thayers, and others prominent in society. They would be enough to adorn any important occasion in 1912, but what made the *Titanic* special was the presence of leaders in so many different fields: the artist Frank Millet; the editor W. T. Stead; the theatrical producer Henry B. Harris; President Taft's military aide Archie Butt; the elderly philanthropist Isidor Straus and his wife, Ida. Also noted, but not named, were thirty-one personal maids and valets.

What makes the list even more intriguing today are certain inaccuracies and omissions. It included, for instance, the name of at least one man who wasn't on board at all. Frank Carlson was an American visiting France who hoped to catch the *Titanic* home. While he was driving to Cherbourg his car broke down, and he missed the boat. But his name remained on the passenger list and later on the casualty list. Sixty years afterward, Carlson's family were still trying to correct the error.

Others were not on the passenger list but definitely on the *Titanic*. Sir Cosmo and Lady Duff Gordon were for some reason traveling as Mr. and Mrs. Morgan—an odd decision since Lady Duff Gordon was one of society's most important couturieres and lived by publicity.

More understandable was the decision of George Rosenshine and Maybelle Thorne to be listed as Mr. and Mrs. G. Thorne. They were not married, but traveling together, and in an age of Edwardian values, appearances were often more important than reality.

Three other passengers found it absolutely essential to travel incognito. They were professional cardsharpers hoping to make a maiden-voyage killing. Obviously it was safer to use an assumed name; so George "Boy" Bradley was listed as George Brayton; C. H. Romaine as C. Rolmane; and Harry "Kid" Homer as E. Haven. There's evidence that the well-known gambler Jay Yates was also on board, using the alias J. H. Rogers. Neither name appears on the passenger list, but a farewell note signed by Rogers was later handed to a survivor on the sloping boat deck.

Along with the deceptions, the *Titanic*'s passenger list had its share of printer's errors. On the list was Mrs. Churchill Cardell, whose last name should have been spelled Candee. In an era when genteel ladies were regarded as helpless creatures to be protected by solicitous males, Helen Churchill Candee had already jumped the traces with a book called *How Women May Earn a Living.* But it was not her literary career that put Helen Candee on the *Titanic;* it was a personal emergency. Her son had been hurt in an airplane accident—a novelty in 1912 that vicariously added to her own glamour—and she was hurrying to his bedside.

Meanwhile she must make the best of things. It was the off-season, and some eighty-seven unattached men were in first class. Several of them noticed the handsome woman traveling alone, and soon six shipboard swains were vying for her attention.

Of them all, she knew only Colonel Archibald Gracie, slightly. An amateur military historian, he had just finished a detailed Civil War battle history, *The Truth about Chickamauga.* Two others of the group had been recommended to her by mutual friends: Hugh Woolner, son of a noted English sculptor, and Edward A. Kent, a Buffalo architect. The rest were shipboard acquaintances. Clinch Smith was a Long Island socialite who kept polo ponies and lived mostly in Paris; Bjornstrom Steffanson was a wealthy young Swedish businessman; and E. P. Colley was a roly-poly Irishman who laughed a lot but said little.

They were all dazzled by Mrs. Candee, and she in turn "felt divinely flattered to be in such company." Together they formed one of those groups that sometimes happen on an Atlantic crossing, where the chemistry is just right and the members are inseparable . . . at least until last night out. To Colonel Gracie they were "our coterie."

The days glided by, one blending into another to form a seamless whole. The sky was always sunny, the ocean calm. But on Sunday, April 14, the weather suddenly turned cold. Most passengers stayed inside, writing letters and catching up on their reading.

Mrs. Candee and Hugh Woolner decided to go down to the lounge for tea. They settled into a green velvet settee before a glowing grate. Stewards arrived with steaming pots of tea and plates of buttered toast, and Helen Candee sensed a general feeling of total well-being and contentment—rare indeed since her son's accident.

The spell was broken by the bugle to dress for dinner. For the next hour, first class seemed almost empty, as "our coterie" and the others struggled behind closed stateroom doors with hundreds of shirt studs and thousands of hairpins.

Dinner was the social high point of the day. The elite dined in the À la Carte Restaurant, but the main dining saloon on D deck had glitter enough. The men were in white tie or tuxedo, the ladies in pale satin or clinging gauze.

After a dinner of filet mignon, "our coterie" took a table together in the adjoining reception room for coffee and the nightly concert by the *Titanic*'s band. Wallace Hartley and his musicians were immensely popular with the passengers and always willing to play any request. Tonight they played some Puccini for Mrs. Candee and a little Dvořák for Hugh Woolner.

Colonel Gracie used the concert as an opportunity to circulate among the crowded little tables that filled the room. He was an indefatigable celebrity collector, but tonight the big names were dining in the À la Carte Restaurant up on B deck, where the Wideners were giving a small dinner for Captain Smith. Around 9:30 Gracie decided to break off the evening and retire.

By 11:00 the rest of the crowd in the reception room was breaking up too, and the band finished the evening with selections from *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Soon the big room was completely empty except for one table. Mrs. Candee and "our coterie" were going as strong as ever. But even they felt the emptiness of the room and decided to look for someplace cozier.

Somebody suggested the Café Parisien, the showpiece of the ship, stylish but intimate. But all they found there was one other party, presided over by Archie Butt, President Taft's aide.

And it was so cold. They ordered hot drinks, and a waiter appeared with a tray of grog, steaming Scotch and lemon, and hot lemonade. Even these didn't help, and around 11:20 Mrs. Candee reluctantly went below to her stateroom.

Colley also drifted off, and the four remaining members of "our coterie" now went up to the smoking room, a male sanctuary where the ship's night owls customarily gathered. Someone produced a pack of cards, and the foursome began to play a rather lighthearted game of bridge. It was now nearly 11:40 p.m.

Suddenly an interruption. As Hugh Woolner recalled it a few days later in a letter to a friend, "There came a heavy grinding sort of a shock, beginning far ahead of us in the bows and rapidly passing along the ship and away under our feet."

It was not severe, but everyone in the room sprang up, and several of the more curious—including Woolner and Steffanson—darted through the swinging doors aft and onto the open promenade deck. Steffanson's eyes couldn't adjust to the sudden darkness fast enough, but he heard one of the others call out, "We hit an iceberg—there it is!"

"Everything Was Against Us"

THE bridge was as surprised as the gentlemen in the smoking room. How could the *Titanic* have collided with an iceberg so suddenly, so unexpectedly?

To find the answer, we must start back on the afternoon of April 12 as the *Titanic*—one day out of Queenstown—steamed westward across a calm, sunny sea. Around sunset a wireless message arrived from the French liner *La Touraine* warning of ice ahead. Captain Smith gave the position to Fourth Officer Boxhall, and Boxhall noted it on the map in the chart room, but it was far to the north of the *Titanic*'s track—no need to worry.

Late on the night of the thirteenth, the *Titanic* passed the Furness Withy liner *Rappahannock*, eastbound from Halifax to London. She had recently encountered heavy pack ice, twisting her rudder and denting her bow. The *Rappahannock* warned the *Titanic* by blinker of the danger ahead. The great White Star liner flashed back an acknowledgment and hurried on into the night.

Sunday April 14, and the wireless brought a spate of fresh warnings. At 9:00 a.m. (*Titanic* time) the Cunard liner *Caronia* reported BERGS, GROWLERS, AND FIELD ICE IN 42°N, FROM 49° TO 51°W. At 11:40 the Dutch liner *Noordam* also reported MUCH ICE in roughly the same position, and at 1:42 p.m. the White Star liner *Baltic* reported ICEBERGS AND LARGE QUANTITY OF FIELD ICE IN 41°51′N 49°9′W—about 250 miles ahead.

At 1:45 p.m. still another ice message arrived—the fourth of the day. The German liner *Amerika* reported passing two large icebergs at 41°27′ north, 50°8′ west. Nothing more till 7:30 p.m.; then a fifth message came, from the Leyland liner *Californian*, position 42°3′ north, 49°9′ west: THREE LARGE BERGS FIVE MILES TO SOUTHWARD OF US. The ice was now only fifty miles ahead.

Finally, at 9:40 p.m., the Atlantic Transport liner *Mesaba:* 42°N TO 41°25′N, 40°W TO 50°30′W, SAW MUCH HEAVY PACK ICE AND GREAT NUMBER LARGE ICEBERGS, ALSO FIELD ICE. The *Titanic* was already in the rectangle blocked out by this warning.

Put together, the six messages indicated an enormous belt of ice stretching some seventy-eight miles across the big ship's path. But the messages were not put together. According to the four surviving officers, most of the warnings went unnoticed on the bridge. Fourth Officer Boxhall, who was always Captain Smith's choice for marking the ship's chart, could only remember pricking off *La Touraine*'s sighting on April 12.

Of the ice messages received on the fourteenth, there is firm information about only two. The *Caronia*'s sighting, received at 9:00 a.m., appears to have been noted by Boxhall. Third Officer Pitman distinctly remembered seeing him jot the single word ice on a slip of paper, with the *Caronia*'s sighting underneath, and then tuck the slip into a frame above the chart-room table. Other officers recalled seeing the same sighting pricked off on the chart—also Boxhall's work. And around 12:45 Captain Smith showed the complete *Caronia* message to Second Officer Lightoller, senior officer on the bridge at the time.

About an hour later Captain Smith had the *Baltic*'s warning too, but there's no evidence that he showed it to anybody on the bridge. Instead, he took it with him as he started down for lunch about 1:45. On the promenade deck he ran into Bruce Ismay, chairman and managing director of the White Star Line, and handed him the *Baltic*'s message as a matter of interest. Ismay glanced at it, stuffed it in his pocket, and went on down to lunch.

The four other messages were not remembered by any of the surviving officers. The *Noordam*'s warning was acknowledged by Captain Smith, but what he did with it nobody knows. Second Wireless Operator Harold Bride testified that he took the *Californian*'s message to the bridge but didn't know to whom he gave it. The *Amerika* and *Mesaba* warnings were received by First Wireless Operator John Phillips, but what happened to them remains a mystery.

The cumulative effect of the messages—warning after warning, the whole day long—was lost completely, indicating a complacency, an arrogant casualness, that permeated the bridge. Yet there was ample opportunity to avoid disaster. Every officer on the bridge, from Captain Smith to the very junior Sixth Officer Moody, knew the *Titanic* might encounter ice that night. It was with this thought in mind that Smith left the Wideners' party shortly before 9:00 and joined Lightoller on the bridge.

As they peered into a black, cloudless night, Smith remarked it was cold. Lightoller: "Yes. It is only one degree above freezing." He described the precautions he was taking: a warning to the carpenter to watch his fresh water supply, keep it from freezing . . . another to the engine room to keep an eye on the steam winches.

Smith got back to the weather: "There is not much wind."

"No. It is a flat calm, as a matter of fact."

When Smith then brought up the ice, Lightoller remarked that it was rather a pity the breeze didn't keep up while they were going through the danger area. Icebergs were so much easier to spot at night if the wind stirred up some surf. But they decided that even if the berg "showed a blue side"—the dark underside—they would have enough warning. At 9:25 the subject was exhausted, and the captain turned in, saying, "If it becomes at all doubtful, let me know at once. I'll be just inside."

Not one word about slowing down. Why was this most obvious of all precautions not even mentioned? The answer is that Captain Smith was following the practice of most captains on the Atlantic run. Knuckling under to the competitive pressure of keeping on schedule, they ran at full steam, despite strong evidence that ice was not as easily sighted as generally claimed.

So the *Titanic* raced on through the starlit night of April 14. At 10:00 p.m. First Officer Murdoch arrived on the bridge to take over Lightoller's watch. His first words: "It's pretty cold."

"Yes, it's freezing," answered Lightoller, and he added that the ship might be up around the ice anytime now. The air temperature was down to thirty-two degrees, the water an even colder thirty-one. A warm bunk was clearly the place to be, and Lightoller quickly passed on what else the new watch needed to know: the carpenter and engine room had been told to watch their water . . . the crow's nest had been warned to keep a sharp lookout for ice, especially small ice and growlers . . . the captain had left word to be called "if it becomes at all doubtful." Lightoller now went off on his final rounds, while Murdoch pondered the empty night.

A few yards aft along the boat deck, First Wireless Operator Phillips dug into a stack of outgoing messages. His set had a range of only four hundred miles during daylight, and the American traffic had piled up. Now at last he was in touch with Cape Race, Newfoundland, and was working off the backlog. Some were passenger messages for New York—arrival times, requests for hotel reservations, instructions to business associates. Others were being relayed for ships no longer in direct touch with land.

At 11:00 p.m. the steamer *Californian* suddenly broke in: I SAY, OLD MAN, WE'RE STOPPED AND SURROUNDED BY ICE. She was so close that her signal almost blasted Phillips' ears off.

SHUT UP, SHUT UP, he shot back. I'M BUSY. I'M WORKING CAPE RACE. Then he went back to the outgoing pile of messages like this one relayed from a passenger on the *Amerika:* NO SEASICKNESS. ALL WELL. NOTIFY ALL INTERESTED. POKER BUSINESS GOOD. AL.

In the crow's nest, Lookouts Fleet and Lee peered into the dark. At 11:40 Fleet spotted something even blacker than the night. He banged the crow's-nest bell three times and lifted the phone to the bridge. Three words were enough. "Iceberg right ahead."

Now it was Murdoch's problem. He put his helm hard astarboard, hoping to "port around" the ice, and at the same time pulled the engine-room telegraph to STOP and then REVERSE ENGINES. But it was too late. Thirty-seven seconds later the *Titanic* brushed by the berg with a faint grinding jar.

The thirty-seven seconds—based on tests later made with the *Olympic*—are significant because at twenty-two and a half knots the *Titanic* was moving at a rate of thirty-eight feet a second, meaning that the berg had been sighted less than five hundred yards away. But all the experts agreed that on such a clear night it should have been seen much farther off.

Suspicion focused first on the lookouts. How good were their eyes? Tests after the collision showed that both Fleet and Lee had sound vision. Nor were they inexperienced. Unlike most lines, White Star used trained, full-time lookouts.

Lightoller contributed what became known as the blue-berg theory. He argued that the iceberg had recently capsized and was showing only the dark side that had previously been underwater, making it almost invisible. But this theory did not seem to fit the recollections of the few survivors who actually saw the berg. It was anything but invisible to Quartermaster Rowe, standing on the after bridge. He estimated that it was about a hundred feet high, and he initially mistook it for a windjammer gliding along the side of the ship, with all sails set.

The only explanation left was fate. As Lightoller put it at the later court hearing, the *Titanic* was the victim of an extraordinary set of circumstances that could only happen once in a hundred years. Normally there would have been no problem, but on this particularly freakish night "everything was against us."

This explanation implies that Captain Smith didn't know the nature of the night he was up against. But he did know. He realized that the sea was flat calm, that there was no moon, no wind, no swell. He took all this into account in deciding not to reduce speed. Under these circumstances the collision loses its supernatural quality and becomes simply a case of miscalculation.

Given the competitive pressures of the North Atlantic run, the lack of experience with ships of such immense size, the casualness of the bridge, and the misassessment of what speed was safe, it's remarkable that the *Titanic* steamed for two hours and ten minutes through ice-infested waters without coming to grief any sooner.

"Everything was against us"? The wonder is that she lasted as long as she did.

The Gash

WHAT did the iceberg really do to the *Titanic*, and could anything have been done to save her? The report of the official British inquiry found that "the damage extended over a length of about three hundred feet," and this is generally taken to mean a continuous gash running from the bow for three hundred feet along the starboard side of the ship. Countless illustrators have depicted it in books and magazines—a single jagged slash, ugly and lethal-looking.

Actually, such a gash would have sunk the *Titanic* in less than an hour. The true nature of the damage may someday be revealed through exploration of the wreck. But even the most sophisticated equipment will probably tell us less than a little-known witness at the British inquiry, who knew the *Titanic* far better than any survivor or future investigator.

Edward Wilding was a naval architect at Harland & Wolff. His primary concern had been the design of the *Titanic*, and he seemed to have at his fingertips every dimension of the ship. He knew, for instance, the exact length of each watertight compartment. Using these figures, he estimated that the gash along the starboard side must have run some 249 feet—the length of the first five compartments plus the first two feet of the sixth.

Estimating the width of the gash was more complicated, but he found clues in the testimony of witnesses who had been on the spot. Ten minutes after the crash, Leading Fireman Fred Barrett saw eight feet of water in boiler room 6, which was five feet above the keel of the ship. Ten minutes later Third Officer Pitman watched bags of registered letters floating around the mail room, twenty-four feet above the keel. Another five minutes and the squash court was awash, thirty-two feet above the keel. Fifteen minutes more and the sea was flooding into the seamen's quarters on E deck forward, forty-eight feet above the keel. Putting the evidence together, Edward Wilding estimated that sixteen thousand cubic feet of water had entered the shattered hull in the first forty minutes. He then calculated that the area of damage had to be twelve square feet.

But this posed a new problem. If the damage was really a continuous gash 249 feet long, then it would have averaged less than three quarters of an inch high to work out at twelve square feet. Since this was most unlikely, it followed that the gash was not continuous, but rather a series of separate pokes and stabs as the berg bumped along the side of the *Titanic*. Some of these stabs were great rents, like the hole in number 1 hold, where the berg penetrated three and a half feet inside the ship. Other times the ice barely pierced the hull, like the hole in boiler room 5, which spouted a stream as thin as a deck hose.

Whatever the nature of the wound, it was fatal. It completely flooded the first five compartments, pulling the bow down so far that the water in the fifth compartment slopped over the top of the after bulkhead into the sixth, which in turn overflowed into the seventh, and so on until the ship had to sink.

The first moments after the collision are among the most difficult to sort out. A series of rapidly changing orders jangled from the bridge to the engine room, but none of the surviving witnesses agreed on the exact sequence, the timing, or even the purpose. Greaser Fred Scott testified that immediately after the collision, the engine-room telegraph bells rang STOP ENGINES . . . then, ten or fifteen minutes later, SLOW AHEAD . . . another ten minutes and again STOP ENGINES . . . then four or five minutes and SLOW ASTERN . . . five more minutes and once again STOP ENGINES. This time they stopped for good.

Trimmer Patrick Dillon, the only other survivor from the engine room, thought that the signal "stop engines" came just before the crash, that "slow astern" came before "slow ahead," and that the ship went slow ahead for only two minutes, not ten.

Why the *Titanic* started ahead again, how long and how fast she went, and which direction she took are important in fixing her correct position when she began calling for help. It has been suggested that Captain Smith was making for the light of another ship on the horizon, but there's no evidence that such a light had yet been sighted, and Captain Smith had no reason yet to suspect that his ship had been seriously injured. In fact, Fourth Officer Boxhall's first, quick inspection down in the passengers' quarters brought the good news that he could find no damage at all.

The bad news came soon enough—from the carpenter; from holds 1, 2, and 3; from the firemen's quarters; from the mail room; from boiler rooms 5 and 6. If Smith still had any hope, it was dispelled by the arrival of Thomas Andrews on the bridge. As managing director of Harland & Wolff, Andrews knew the ship more intimately than anyone else on board. He gave the *Titanic* from an hour to an hour and a half.

Could anything have been done to save her? Over the years suggestions have ranged from stuffing the gash with bedding to a headlong run for the light that glimmered most of the night on the horizon. But no amount of bedding could have stemmed the torrent pouring into the *Titanic*, and steaming for the light can be ruled out because it was not sighted soon enough.

Actually, there seemed to be only one moment when the *Titanic* might have been saved, and that came at the very start of the crisis, when Lookout Fleet reported the iceberg to the bridge. If First Officer Murdoch had steamed right at the berg instead of trying to miss it, he might have saved the ship. There would have been a fearful crash—passengers and crew in the first hundred feet would have been killed by the impact—but the *Titanic* would have remained afloat. Murdoch could not be blamed, however, for trying to miss it. He did what he had been trained to do—what any prudent officer would do in the same circumstances.

Now that it had happened, there was only one course left open for Captain Smith. It was almost exactly midnight—the 12:00 to 4:00 watch was just coming on deck in a last display of normal shipboard routine—when he gave the order to take to the boats.

THIS decision brought Captain Smith face to face with a painful mathematical fact: there were lifeboats enough for only 1178 of the 2201 people on board the *Titanic*. Even if every boat got away filled to capacity, 1023 individuals would be left behind with no chance of escape.

It could have been worse. The *Titanic* was certified to carry 3547 passengers and crew, but she was less than two thirds full. Also, regulations required the *Titanic* to carry boats for only 962 persons, but the White Star Line liked little flourishes and threw in space for an extra 216. In a worst-case situation the *Titanic* might lawfully have gone to sea with lifeboats for only twenty-seven percent of her passengers and crew.

Responsibility for this state of affairs went back to a regulatory body called the Board of Trade, which set the safety standards for British ships. The *Titanic* came under the board's regulations governing vessels of ten thousand tons and upward, the maximum category at the time the rules were issued in 1894. Since then the size and capacity of ships had increased dramatically—the *Titanic* was nearly four times as large as any vessel of the '90s—but the lifeboat requirements remained the same.

The members of the Board of Trade were mostly decorative luminaries, like the Archbishop of Canterbury. On nautical matters they deferred to the professional staff of the board's marine department. But these men were bureaucrats—better at carrying out policy than making it. When it came to such questions as whether ships should provide lifeboats for all on board, these men deferred to the department's merchant shipping advisory committee. This group was dominated by the shipowners themselves, and they did not want boats for all.

In the luxury trade, boats for all meant less room on the upper decks for the suites, the games and sports, the verandas, and the glass-enclosed observation lounges that lured the wealthy travelers from the competition. On the *Titanic*, for instance, it would have meant sacrificing the vast play area amidships and instead cluttering the boat deck with—of all things—boats.

In steerage, the other place where there was big money to be made, boats for all would have been even more costly. Nineteen lifeboats would have been required for steerage alone . . . or nearly sixty boats, counting everybody. Almost any owner would prefer to use most of this space in some revenue-producing way—if he could persuade himself that the boats weren't really necessary.

This proved easy to do. The new superliners could easily ride out the storms that had sometimes engulfed steamers of the past. Increased compartmentalization seemed to assure safety, since no one could imagine anything worse than being rammed at the point where two compartments joined. The development of wireless would end the days when ships simply disappeared. In the future, lifeboats would only be used to ferry passengers and crew to the rescue ships, and to do that, nobody needed boats for all.

The utter speciousness of the owners' arguments became clear within days of the sinking. All the objections to boats for all suddenly vanished. When the *Olympic* sailed from New York April 25, the line's announcement emphasized that she would have "boat and life-raft capacity for every person on board."

Until the *Titanic*, the public seemed perfectly willing to accept the inadequate supply of lifeboats. Like air travelers today, a liner's passengers understood that if the ship went down, they might well go with it. As White Star's general manager, Harold Sanderson, put it, "There are certain risks connected with going to sea which it is impossible to eliminate."

Captain Smith knew the risks. At midnight April 14–15 he was well aware that his ship had only sixteen wooden boats in the davits. In addition there were four Englehardt collapsibles—semirafts with wooden bottoms and canvas sides. They were stowed flat on deck, upside down, with the sides folded in, to be assembled if they were ever needed. This must have been considered a remote possibility, for two of them were stowed on the roof of the officers' quarters, with no easy way of getting them down to the boat deck.

Now it was up to Captain Smith to make the best of this small fleet, with an untried crew, uninformed passengers, and a ship that had never held a proper boat drill.

What Happened to the Goodwins?

AT MIDNIGHT April 14–15 the shortage of lifeboats on the *Titanic* was academic; the question was, who would get to use them? The White Star Line always claimed that the only rule was, Women and children first; there was no distinction, the line insisted, between first-, second-, and third-class passengers.

Yet there remained those uncomfortable statistics: Fifty-three percent of first- and second-class passengers saved, but only twenty-five percent of third class. Ninety-four percent of first- and second-class women and children saved, but only forty-two percent of those in third class. In first class just one child was lost, while in third class fifty-two out of seventy-nine children were lost—about the same percentage as first-class men.

The White Star Line was full of explanations: the third-class passengers were more reluctant to leave the ship; they didn't want to part with their luggage; it was hard to get them up from their quarters. At the British inquiry one crew member after another assured the court that there was no discrimination; but not a single third-class passenger was called as a witness.

The court accepted all of White Star's explanations and seemed impressed by the point that many steerage passengers were foreign and couldn't understand the crew's instructions.

How, then, to explain the loss of the entire Goodwin family—father, mother, and six children? There was no language barrier there; they were from London.

Frederick Goodwin was a forty-year-old electrical engineer who, with his wife, Augusta, and their children, was emigrating to America. He booked passage on one of the more modest steamers operating out of Southampton. Since the Goodwins had little in the way of savings, they would be traveling third class.

Then came the lucky break. Due to the coal strike, their sailing was canceled, and they were transferred to the new, glamorous *Titanic*. They were still in third class, but on the *Titanic* that was as good as first class on most of the older, smaller liners. The Goodwins probably occupied two of the four-berth cabins at the very stern of the ship, which White Star reserved for single women and for families traveling together. Single men were quartered in the bow. But during the day all third-class passengers mingled on deck and in the various public rooms. They could go anywhere, as long as they didn't cross the barriers and gates that barred access to second- and first-class space.

On White Star ships third class was encouraged to retire by 10:00 p.m., and the Goodwins were undoubtedly in bed when that faint grinding jar shook the *Titanic* at 11:40 on the night of April 14. Whether they were awakened by the jar no one knows, but they were certainly up shortly after midnight, when the third-class bedroom stewards went through the long white corridors, banging on doors and telling everybody to put on their life belts.

Pouring into the hallways, the passengers tended to congregate at the foot of the main third-class stairway on E deck. Here they waited for instructions. Word gradually spread that the *Titanic* had hit an iceberg, but the crowd waited—restless, complaining, although certainly not rebellious. Their only clue to the condition of the ship was the definite forward tilt of the linoleum beneath their feet. The lights still burned brightly, and buried on E deck, these passengers couldn't see that the *Titanic*'s lifeboats were now dropping to the sea and being rowed off into the night.

Shortly before 1:00 a.m., the long-awaited instructions came: "Pass the women and children up to the boat deck." The order was by no means easy to carry out. Here and there, wives refused to leave their husbands, children clung to their fathers.

Somehow Steward John E. Hart managed to collect a group of thirty, and he escorted them up the stairway to C deck, across the open well deck, into first-class space, and finally up the grand staircase to the boat deck.

It was now 1:10, and boat 8 was about to leave. Hart handed over his charges to the men at the davits and headed back to steerage for another group.

By the time he reached the third-class stairs again, matters had taken an ugly turn. The male passengers were now demanding to go up to the boat deck too, and it was all the stewards could do to hold them back. Hart again set out, with about twenty-five in tow, and reached the boat deck around 1:35. He could see no boats left except number 15, still in the davits but ready to be lowered.

Not a moment to lose. He bundled his people into the boat and made a lightning assessment: the *Titanic* was finished . . . no time to go back for one more group. With a nod from the officer standing by the davits, Hart too jumped into the boat.

In all, he had brought up some fifty-five women and children—nearly half the total number of third-class passengers saved—but the Goodwins weren't among them. Possibly the family refused to be parted. Possibly they remained below, waiting in vain for one more party to be escorted topside. Possibly they tired of the long wait, struck off on their own, but didn't make it to the boat deck until too late.

It's difficult even to speculate, not because of any policy to hold back third class but because there was no policy. Some gates were open; some were closed. Some passengers were assisted, some were stopped, some were left to shift for themselves.

While the third-class passengers were having a hard time, many of the lifeboats were leaving the *Titanic* half filled. There was room for only half those on board the ship. It seems incredible that the space available—good for 1178 people—was occupied by only 705. There was room for another 473—more than enough for all the women and children lost. Why wasn't it used?

At the bottom of the trouble was the lack of organization that characterized the whole night. The *Titanic* had never held a boat drill, and few of the crew had any experience in handling the davits. They had boat assignments, but these had only been posted after leaving Queenstown. Few had bothered to look up their stations. The manning of the boats was hopelessly haphazard: number 6 had a crew of only two; number 3 had fifteen.

The passengers had no boat assignments at all. They simply milled around the decks waiting for someone to tell them what to do, but there were no clear lines of authority. And there was no consistency in loading the boats. To Second Officer Lightoller, women and children first meant women and children only, even if that meant not filling a boat. First Officer Murdoch, on the other hand, put in men when there were no women. A man's life could depend on which side of the boat deck he stepped out on.

Then there was that problem of class distinction. Some of the crew, and passengers too, believed that the boats were reserved for the class where they were located. When two second-class ladies asked an officer if they could pass to the forward boats in first-class space, passenger Lawrence Beesley heard the officer reply, "No, madam. Your boats are down on your deck."

For the first hour, few of the *Titanic*'s passengers took the collision very seriously—which is another reason why the early boats didn't contain more people. They far preferred the warmth and comfort of the brightly lit ship to the prospect of spending a dark, cold night bobbing about the Atlantic in a rowboat. When the first boat to be loaded, number 7, was swung out and Murdoch called for passengers, only a trickle responded. He finally lowered the boat at 12:45 with just twenty-eight persons aboard.

IN THE smoking room, "our coterie" had resumed their bridge game, but it wasn't as jolly as before. After a hand or two, Hugh Woolner and Bjornstrom Steffanson excused themselves and went below to check on Mrs. Candee. They found her, puzzled but all right, and Steffanson apparently went back to the smoking room. But by now the ship had stopped, and Woolner invited Mrs. Candee for a walk, "to see how things are going."

The boat deck was bitter cold; the funnels were blowing off steam with a deafening roar; the *Titanic* had a pronounced list to starboard. They nervously cracked a few jokes, even talked of life and death. They drifted into the lounge, where they had enjoyed a cozy afternoon tea. Now it was empty.

They moved to the promenade deck and heard the sailors above beginning to swing out the boats. Wandering by the entrance to the grand staircase, they saw passengers streaming up, all wearing life belts. "Is this orders?" Woolner asked a man by the door. "Orders," the man briefly replied.

They went down to Mrs. Candee's stateroom. Woolner found her life belt and tied it on her; then he hurried off to get his own, promising to meet her in a few minutes, topside.

As she started up the stairs Edward A. Kent—another member of the coterie—dashed up. On impulse, she handed him an ivory miniature of her mother, asking him to keep it for her. He had doubts about his own safety but slipped it into his pocket. It was still there when his body was picked up a week later.

Woolner and Steffanson reappeared, and together they hurried Mrs. Candee into boat 6, the first lifeboat lowered on the port side. Of the coterie, Colonel Gracie seems to have been the busiest. He had offered his services to four other "unprotected ladies" and was doing his best to see them into boats. It was after 1:00 before he began searching for Mrs. Candee. He finally ran into Kent, who assured him that she was safely off the ship.

By now there was no lack of people willing to leave the *Titanic*, but a new problem arose. The officers in charge of launching the boats were afraid to put too many passengers in them for fear they might buckle and pitch everyone into the sea. Actually, Harland & Wolff had designed all the boats to be lowered with their full complement of people. If the officers ever knew this, nobody remembered it that night. Boat 6 rowed off with a maximum of twenty-eight people, boat 8 with thirty-nine, boat 2 with twenty-six.

Lightoller decided he might get more people into the boats by utilizing the portside lower-deck gangway. He sent six seamen down to open the doors, and ordered the boats, once afloat, to row there and receive additional passengers. But the doors were never opened; the men sent down were never seen again. They were probably trapped by some sudden inflow of water.

There was apparently a similar plan for boats on the starboard side. Lawrence Beesley recalled hearing an officer calling down to the crew of number 13, "Lower away, and when afloat, row around to the gangway and wait for further orders." Captain Smith was also calling on the boats to stay within hailing distance.

Some did . . . for a while. But the sight of that great hulk, lights ablaze, sagging into the ocean, proved too frightening. She was clearly doomed now, and there was talk of suction and a huge wave that would swamp any boats that remained too close. One by one they crept away into the night.

On the *Titanic* herself, the mood had changed to desperation. By 1:15 the water was lapping at the letters of her name on the bow. Drunkenly she staggered from a slight list to starboard to a heavy list to port. The downward tilt of the deck grew steeper.

Time was running out. The officers in charge of loading the boats no longer hesitated to fill them. Number 11 went off with seventy, number 14 with sixty-three, number 15 with seventy.

But haste could be costly. It probably explains the worst case of a boat leaving the *Titanic* with too few people. Technically number 1 was an emergency boat—smaller than a regular lifeboat, manned by a specially trained crew, and ready for instant launching in such situations as a man overboard. It was the first boat on the starboard side, just aft of the bridge.

Since number 1 was always kept swung out, the crew did not bother with it when they first came on deck to clear the boats. Instead, they started with number 3 and worked their way aft. The crowd followed along, and by the time Murdoch turned his attention to number 1, the only passengers in the vicinity were a haughty English couple, Sir Cosmo and Lady Duff Gordon, and Miss L. M. Francatelli, Lady Duff Gordon's secretary. There seems no clear reason why they didn't go aft with the mob; perhaps it just wasn't their way of doing things.

When the boat was ready for launching, Murdoch called for women and children, but none appeared. Lady Duff Gordon had already made up her mind that she would never leave her husband, and Miss Francatelli wouldn't go alone. Finally Sir Cosmo stepped up and asked if all three couldn't enter the boat. Murdoch replied, "Yes, I wish you would." They climbed in as he again called for women and children. This time two American businessmen came up, and Murdoch put them in too.

Hundreds of women must have been still on the boat deck, but Murdoch apparently felt there was no time to search for them. His one idea seems to have been to get the boat away. The ship was sinking fast, and he needed the empty davits for the two starboard collapsibles. He plucked two seamen and five stokers from members of the crew standing by, put Lookout George Symons in charge, and told him to row out two hundred yards, ready to come back when summoned. At 1:10 boat 1, capacity forty persons, dropped down to the sea with just twelve people aboard, only five of them passengers.

Even the last boat lowered, collapsible D, was launched with plenty of room in the bow. As it dropped by the open end of the promenade deck Hugh Woolner and Bjornstrom Steffanson were standing there and noticed the empty space. They decided to jump for it as the water washed onto the deck and over their evening slippers. This was dangerous, for boats hanging in davits are notoriously tippy, but they got away with it, and collapsible D pulled away with forty-four of its forty-seven places filled.

There remained collapsibles A and B, stowed in an inaccessible spot, on the roof of the officers' quarters. Murdoch led a small group trying to free collapsible A on the starboard side, while Lightoller's men struggled with collapsible B on the port side. With enormous effort, the two boats were wrestled to the edge of the roof, and oars were placed against the wall to slide them down to the boat deck. A handful of passengers quietly looked on, trying to calculate their chances. Should they wait there in the slim hope of a place in these two boats, or should they head aft toward the momentary safety of the poop deck?

Colonel Gracie and fellow coterie member Clinch Smith decided to head aft, but suddenly their way was blocked by hundreds of steerage passengers surging up the companionway from somewhere below. Who they were or where they had been until now remains a mystery. Had they been restrained until this last desperate moment? Had they been waiting to be escorted to the boat deck, when time simply ran out? No one will ever know, for all were soon engulfed by the water now sweeping up the deck.

There were women as well as men in this crowd, and it offers our best clue to what happened to the Goodwin family. Sticking together, they probably reached the boat deck too late for a chance at the boats. Now, somewhere in this nameless, faceless mass of human beings, Frederick and Augusta Goodwin stood with their six children, quietly prepared to meet the end.

Shots in the Dark

AT LEAST the *Titanic* was spared the horror of a panic. The crew did not battle the passengers for the lifeboats, as they did when the French liner *La Bourgogne* went down in 1898. With few exceptions, the passengers behaved admirably, and the crew did their duty—often at a fearful price. The statistics tell the story: the captain, chief officer, and first officer—all lost; the engineers—all lost; the pursers and officers of the victualing department—all lost; the eight bandsmen—all lost; the five bellboys—all lost.

Fearing there might be trouble, the officers loading the boats were armed with pistols, but in more than two thousand pages of testimony at the hearings, there is only one thoroughly documented case in which a gun was fired. As boat 14 was being lowered a group of steerage passengers tried to jump in, and Fifth Officer Lowe fired several shots along the side of the ship to keep them out.

There also seems to have been some gunfire during the loading of collapsible C—the last boat lowered on the starboard side forward—which takes on added interest since it was the boat that took off Bruce Ismay, head of the White Star Line. Ismay never mentioned any disorder at the hearings. Yet Hugh Woolner was quite specific on the point, both in a letter written on the *Carpathia* and later in his testimony at the Senate investigation.

According to Woolner, he and Steffanson had just helped Lightoller load collapsible D, all the way forward on the port side, when they heard a commotion across the deck on the starboard side. They crossed over in time to see First Officer Murdoch fire his pistol twice in the air, trying to stop a rush on a collapsible—which could only have been collapsible C. Woolner and Steffanson helped restore order, then saw the boat safely away.

In an account privately published for his family and friends in 1940, first-class passenger Jack Thayer partially corroborated Woolner's story:

> There was some disturbance in loading the last two forward starboard boats. A large crowd of men was pressing to get into them. No women were around, as far as I could see. I saw Ismay, who had been assisting in the loading of the last boat, push his way into it. Purser H. W. McElroy was standing up in the next-to-last boat, loading it. Two men—I think they were dining-room stewards—dropped into the boat from the deck above. As they jumped, he fired twice in the air. I do not believe they were hit, but they were quickly thrown out.

There are, of course, discrepancies between Woolner's and Thayer's accounts. Woolner thought Murdoch fired the shots; Thayer thought McElroy did. Woolner thought it was the last boat; Thayer thought it was the next to last. But overriding any discrepancies is the basic similarity: both witnesses independently recalled an officer firing twice into the air to stop a rush on one of the last boats on the starboard side forward.

In both these accounts the shots were fired into the air, not at anybody. It was, then, quite a surprise to run across a personal letter from a survivor describing an actual shooting in the last minutes on the boat deck. The letter, from third-class passenger Eugene Daly to his sister in Ireland, appeared in the London *Daily Telegraph* on May 4, 1912. Describing the scene, Daly wrote:

> At the first cabin [deck] when a boat was being lowered an officer pointed a revolver and said if any man tried to get in, he would shoot him on the spot. I saw the officer shoot two men dead because they tried to get in the boat. Afterwards there was another shot, and I saw the officer himself lying on the deck. They told me he shot himself, but I did not see him. I was up to my knees in the water at the time. Every one was rushing around, and there were no more boats. I then dived overboard.

Afterward Daly reached one of the collapsibles that floated off the ship; but he had been at least in a position to see. Still, it was only one letter. It needed some sort of confirmation.

That came in 1981 with the publishing of *The Titanic, the Psychic and the Sea* by Rustie Brown. In the course of her research, Mrs. Brown ran across an unpublished letter from first-class passenger George Rheims to his wife in France. It is dated April 19, 1912, the day after the *Carpathia* reached New York with the *Titanic*'s survivors. Rheims was one of the few who jumped near the end and ultimately reached collapsible A. Here is the pertinent part of his letter:

> While the last boat was leaving, I saw an officer with a revolver fire a shot and kill a man who was trying to climb into it. As there remained nothing more for him to do, the officer told us, "Gentlemen, each man for himself. Good-bye." He gave a military salute and then fired a bullet into his head. That's what I call a man!

These strikingly similar accounts come from completely independent sources. Each man was writing a private letter to a member of the family, not an account for the press. Both were writing immediately after the event, not years later when fantasy might have taken over. They had no reason to fabricate, but every reason to be telling the truth as they saw it.

The Sound of Music

THE last moments of the *Titanic* are full of mysteries—none more intriguing than those surrounding the ship's band. We know they played, but little else. Where they played, how long they played, and what they played remain matters for speculation. All eight musicians were lost, so there are no firsthand accounts. We can only piece the story together from bits of evidence.

The problem is complicated by the fact that there were two musical units on the *Titanic*, not just a single eight-piece orchestra. First, there was a string-and-piano quintet, led by violinist Wallace Hartley and used for teatime, after-dinner concerts, Sunday services, and the like. In addition, the *Titanic* had a trio of violin, cello, and piano that played exclusively in the reception room outside the À la Carte Restaurant and the Café Parisien. This was all part of White Star's effort to plant a little corner of Paris in the heart of a great British liner.

These two orchestras used separate arrangements, and they did not normally mix. It is likely, but not certain, that on the night of the collision they played together for the first time. Hence, whatever they played had to be relatively simple and easy to handle without sheet music—numbers that the men knew by heart.

Where did they play? Apparently they initially took their stand in the first-class lounge on A deck around 12:15 a.m. Later the band moved up to the boat deck level of the grand staircase. Here they were in the mainstream of the passengers heading from their staterooms to the boats. There was a small piano on the port side of the foyer, and it was put to good use.

Near the end they moved out onto the boat deck itself but still remained near the entrance to the grand staircase. By now the interior of the ship was nearly deserted, and if their music was to do any good, they had to be where people could hear them.

How long did they play? Legend has them carrying on with the water practically up to their knees, but by then the slant of the deck would have been so steep no one could have stood. Colonel Gracie, on board to the last, said that he saw the musicians lay down their instruments about half an hour before the ship sank.

Other witnesses remember the band playing almost to the final plunge. Second Wireless Operator Harold Bride recalls their music while he was on the roof of the officers' quarters struggling to free collapsible B. But perhaps the musicians' best epitaph comes from the testimony of Steward Edward Brown at the British inquiry. When asked how long he heard the band play, Brown replied, "I do not remember hearing them stop."

What were they playing? All agree that the orchestra featured light, cheerful music—ragtime, waltzes, and comic songs. Survivors specifically recalled Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and a pretty English melody called "In the Shadows." Nevertheless, the *Carpathia* had no sooner reached New York than the story spread that the band went down playing "Nearer, my God, to Thee." The idea was so appealing that it instantly became part of the *Titanic* saga—as imperishable as the enduring love of the Strauses, who refused to be separated and died together, and the courage of the engineers who kept the lights burning to the final plunge.

Yet doubts persist. In the first place, the whole point of playing music was to keep the passengers' spirits up, and light music seems best suited to that. As Colonel Gracie observed, "If 'Nearer, my God, to Thee' was one of the selections, I assuredly would have noticed it and regarded it as a tactless warning of immediate death, likely to create a panic."

The hymnologists point out that both British and American survivors recalled "Nearer, my God, to Thee," but ordinarily the hymn is played to entirely different music on the two sides of the Atlantic. In America the setting is normally Lowell Mason's haunting tune "Bethany"; but in Britain it is either J. B. Dykes' "Horbury" or Sir Arthur Sullivan's "Propior Deo." Unless the band played all three versions—an absurdity—more than half of those who remembered the hymn must have been mistaken.

The controversy over "Nearer, my God, to Thee" had barely begun when *The New York Times* introduced another candidate for the band's final number. Based on an exclusive interview with Harold Bride appearing April 19, the morning after the *Carpathia* reached New York, the paper announced on April 21 that the musicians went down playing the Episcopal hymn "Autumn."

Bride was no distant observer; he was on the boat deck to the last. As a wireless operator he was trained to be meticulously accurate. So "Autumn" it was, both in *A Night to Remember* and in accounts by other writers.

Then once again the hymnologists pointed out a problem: "Autumn" is the name of a hymn tune, and in both Britain and America hymns are customarily known by their first line, not by the name of the music that provides the setting. Hence, we refer to "Onward, Christian soldiers," not its tune, "St. Gertrude." If Harold Bride meant a hymn, he would have referred to it by the opening line of some hymn set to this piece of music.

What, then, was Bride referring to when he mentioned "Autumn"? The most likely answer is contained in a series of letters written to me in 1957 by Fred G. Vallance of Detroit, Michigan. Mr. Vallance was bandleader of the Cunard liner *Laconia* at the time of the *Titanic* and was writing from the point of view of a shipboard musician. He pointed out that whatever the band played, it had to be something they all knew by heart—something that could be played on a sloping deck, without sheet music. The hymn tune "Autumn" did not meet these requirements, but a then popular waltz, "Songe d'Automne," did.

"Songe d'Automne," moreover, was generally known simply as "Autumn." It was a major hit in London in 1912, played at skating rinks, cafés, and the like. Harold Bride would probably have known it, and he might well have assumed that his American interviewers understood what he meant.

Whatever the musicians played, they achieved immortality. The bravery of these men, trying to bring comfort to others without a thought to their own safety, captured the public's imagination all over the world. Editorials, speeches, and poetry celebrated the deed, and condolence letters poured into the homes of the bereaved.

Tucked in with the tributes received by the family of violinist Jock Hume was a letter to his father that sounded a strangely jarring note. Dated April 30, 1912—just two weeks after the tragedy—it contained no words of sympathy, just a crisp reminder:

> Dear Sir:
>
> We shall be obliged if you will remit to us the sum of 5s. 4d., which is owing to us as per enclosed statement. We shall also be obliged if you will settle the enclosed uniform account.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> C. W. & F. N. Black

The "enclosed uniform account" included such items as a lyre lapel insignia and sewing White Star buttons on a tunic. Altogether, Hume's account added up to a grand total of fourteen shillings seven pence—or about $3.50 in American money. C. W. and F. N. Black, who so diligently pursued their $3.50, were Jock Hume's agents.

Until 1912 the various steamship lines dealt directly with their musicians, signing them up as members of the crew, like stewards, firemen, and ordinary seamen. The pay was union scale plus a monthly uniform allowance.

Then the Blacks entered the picture. A talent agency based in Liverpool, they promised the steamship companies a simpler and cheaper way to good music. One after another the companies signed contracts giving the Blacks the exclusive right to supply bands to their vessels. The musicians still signed the ship's articles for a token shilling a month, putting them clearly under the captain's authority, but they were now really working for the Blacks, and they had to take what the Blacks were willing to pay them—which turned out to be a sharp cut in salary. Instead of six pounds ten shillings, they now got only four pounds. Instead of a uniform allowance of ten shillings a month, they now got none at all.

The Amalgamated Musicians Union protested without success. Finally, in March 1912, a delegation from the union waited upon Bruce Ismay. As managing director of the White Star Line, maybe he could be persuaded to do something. The great *Olympic* was about to sail from Southampton, and the delegation pointed out that her five-man band was being paid at less than union scale, supplemented only by the monthly shilling that White Star paid to make them officially members of the crew.

If the delegation expected to melt Ismay's heart, they didn't know their man. He replied that if the union objected to White Star's carrying its bandsmen as members of the crew at a shilling a month, the company would carry them as passengers. Sure enough, when the *Olympic* reached New York on March 20, her five musicians all had second-class tickets.

The masquerade continued when the *Titanic* sailed. She, of course, had not only the standard five-man band but the special trio added for the Café Parisien. Hence there were now eight extra names on the second-class passenger list. Otherwise nothing had changed: the musicians still had the same cramped quarters on E deck and certainly none of the perks of passengers. Yet when they played that last night, they played as disciplined members of the ship's crew.

It was natural, then, for the musicians' families to turn first to the White Star Line for financial benefits under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Sorry, said White Star, the bandsmen were passengers and not covered by the act. The line suggested that the families contact C. W. and F. N. Black, the real employers.

Sorry, said the Blacks. They carried insurance to cover such matters, and any claims should be laid at the insurer's door.

Sorry, said the insurance company. The bandsmen were not workmen as covered by the policy. They were independent contractors using the Blacks as a booking agency, and the insurance company was under no liability.

Months passed while White Star, the Blacks, and the insurer tossed this hot potato back and forth. In the end the day was saved by the Titanic Relief Fund, an umbrella organization that was set up to manage the charitable contributions that poured in from all over the world. On January 2, 1913, the fund announced that it would treat the musicians as though they were members of the crew. This opened the door at last to adequate benefits. Welcome news, but no thanks to the White Star Line.

While this shabby little business was unfolding behind the scenes, front stage the drama of the band's heroism continued. On May 18 there occurred one of those great public funerals that the Victorians and Edwardians did so well. Bandmaster Wallace Hartley's body had been retrieved from the ice-strewn waters off Newfoundland, and now he was coming home to his final rest.

Seven bands played as his rosewood casket, borne shoulder-high, was carried through the winding streets of Colne, Hartley's birthplace in the hills of Lancashire. Aldermen, councillors, police, boys' brigades, and musicians from all over England fell in behind—the procession was a half mile long. Thousands lined the route; most wore black or white, but occasionally there were mill girls in their drab shawls and miners in their blue overalls. At the hillside cemetery, as the casket was lowered into the grave a dozen Boy Scouts raised their bugles and sounded the Last Post. The notes echoed off the neighboring hills, drowning out the squabbling and petty maneuvers for that day at least.

"She's Gone"

THE climactic moment of the night came just before 2:20 a.m. The *Titanic*'s stern rose high into the air, the lights went out, and she stood nearly perpendicular to the water, silhouetted against the star-filled sky. She hung there at least a minute, while everything movable broke loose and thundered down through the hull. Then, leaning back slightly, she slid beneath the sea. It was almost like a benediction, Second Officer Lightoller recalled, as the men clinging to overturned collapsible B breathed the two words "She's gone."

Lightoller was sure that the *Titanic* went down intact. Colonel Gracie and Lawrence Beesley, the two survivors who wrote the most authoritative contemporary accounts, agreed.

So it was all the more surprising to find, when the *Titanic* was located seventy-three years later, that the whole stern was missing. Had it broken away during the final plunge or when the ship hit the ocean floor? The pattern of the debris indicates that the fracture most likely happened as the ship started for the bottom. If so, there was good reason to question the reliability of the survivors. After all, Beesley was a mile away in boat 13 and Gracie didn't see the final plunge at all—he was underwater, fighting for his life. Lightoller had a swimmer's-eye view, but much of the time he too was underwater or trying to climb onto collapsible B.

In contrast, there were other survivors—often with a far better vantage point—who saw things quite differently. In fact, of the twenty witnesses who described the final plunge at the American and British investigations, sixteen firmly declared that the *Titanic* either split in two or at least was breaking up as she went under. Account after account described the same sequence: a break or fracture of the hull . . . the forward part disappearing from view . . . the afterpart righting itself briefly, then tilting up on end and plunging down too.

What happened next was the sorriest chapter of the night—the failure of the ship's half-empty lifeboats to heed the cries that rose from the sea. The only excuse is that sheer terror overwhelmed every other instinct.

Take the case of number 8, one of the portside boats launched by Lightoller. After he loaded it with all the women and children he could see, there were still about thirty empty places. The wives began begging Captain Smith, who was standing nearby, to let in some of the husbands to row. But the old captain backed Lightoller to the hilt—the rule was, Women and children only. So the boat was lowered and rowed away half full, with the women still pleading for their men.

Yet after the sinking, many of these very same wives joined the great cry of protest that went up when Seaman Thomas Jones, in charge, proposed to row back and help the people struggling in the water. Hardly anyone wanted to go, and finally the three men at the oars flatly refused to row. Miss Gladys Cherry, an English passenger handling the tiller, was one of the few willing to try, and she later wrote Jones a letter describing her anguish:

> The dreadful regret I shall always have is that we ought to have gone back to see whom we could pick up. But there was only an American lady, my cousin, self, and you who wanted to return. . . . I shall always remember your words, "Ladies, if any of us are saved, remember I wanted to go back. I would rather drown with them than leave them."

As the cries in the water died away, boat 8 resumed rowing toward a light on the northern horizon. It never seemed to get nearer, nor did it ever go away—a tantalizing lure, always just out of reach. Finally, about 3:30 a.m., a rocket flashed far to the southeast, followed by the lights of a new ship rapidly approaching. With relief, number 8 stopped chasing the will-o'-the-wisp to the north and headed for this more promising beacon of hope.

"The Electric Spark"

THE rockets and lights to the southeast signaled the entrance of a man often overlooked in recent accounts of the disaster, yet one who symbolized the robust virtues of the period.

Captain Arthur H. Rostron, commanding the Cunard liner *Carpathia*, brought to the job a driving spirit that was woefully lacking in the *Titanic* crewmen who lay on their oars listening to the cries of the swimmers. Born in 1869, Rostron went to sea at thirteen, spent ten years on sailing ships, joined Cunard, and then rose steadily up the company ladder. Now, at forty-two, he was an experienced, respected shipmaster, known for his quick decisions and for his ability to transmit his own boundless energy into those serving under him. His shipmates nicknamed him the Electric Spark.

In January 1912 he became captain of the 13,564-ton *Carpathia*, which was less than a third the size of the huge *Titanic* but his most important command to date. On the night of April 14–15 she was three days out of New York on a Mediterranean cruise.

At 12:35 a.m. Harold Cottam, the *Carpathia*'s wireless operator, burst into the captain's quarters to report that the *Titanic* had struck a berg and urgently needed help. Rostron's reaction was completely in character. He immediately ordered the *Carpathia* turned around, then asked Cottam if he was sure. Nine out of ten captains would have done it the other way around.

The *Titanic* was fifty-eight miles to the northwest; the *Carpathia*'s maximum speed was believed to be fourteen knots, so she could get there in four hours. That time must not be wasted. Calling his department heads to the bridge, Rostron rattled off a stream of orders to prepare the ship for taking on survivors.

The biggest problem Rostron had to face was ice. If the *Titanic* had hit a berg, so could the *Carpathia*. Reducing speed was out of the question; time was everything. So Rostron took the only course left: he strengthened his lookout. He added a man to the crow's nest, put two men on the bow, and stationed a man on each wing of the bridge. Since he was always on the bridge himself, there were now seven pairs of eyes searching the sea ahead.

Finally, he took one last measure. As Second Officer James Bisset peered into the night from the starboard wing of the bridge, he became aware of Rostron standing nearby. The captain had raised his cap a couple of inches above his head, and his lips were moving in silent prayer.

At 2:45 a.m. Bisset spotted the first berg—about a mile ahead. The *Carpathia* steered around it and raced on. In the next hour and a quarter she dodged five more bergs. At 4:00 a.m. the *Carpathia* reached the *Titanic*'s position, and Rostron cut his engines. He had made his run in three and a half hours—thirty minutes better than his original estimate. For some time he had been watching an occasional green light ahead that would flare up briefly, then fade into the dark again. At first he thought it might be the *Titanic* herself, but now as the *Carpathia* glided to a stop he saw it again, close and low in the water. It was a lifeboat. Rostron eased the *Carpathia* toward it.

The boat was number 2, Fourth Officer Boxhall in charge. He had brought along the green flares with the hope that they might be useful in keeping the *Titanic*'s boats together and serve as a marker for some approaching ship. Now that rescue ship was here, and Boxhall was quickly escorted to the bridge, where he confirmed what Rostron already sensed—the *Titanic* had sunk.

By this time day was breaking, revealing the *Titanic*'s lifeboats scattered over a four-mile area. It also revealed an enormous ice field, just to the west and running northeast to southwest as far as the eye could see. It was studded with individual bergs, some two hundred feet high. Other bergs lay scattered haphazardly along the course the *Carpathia* had just completed.

Even with a sharp lookout, few of these bergs had been sighted, and it seemed incredible that the ship had missed them all. Years later Rostron told his friend Captain Barr of the Cunarder *Caronia*, "When day broke and I saw the ice I had steamed through during the night, I shuddered and could only think that some other hand than mine was on that helm during the night."

Then he was the Electric Spark again. For the next four hours Rostron picked up the *Titanic*'s boats one by one. The survivors came aboard by ladder, chair slings, canvas ash bags, and ropes.

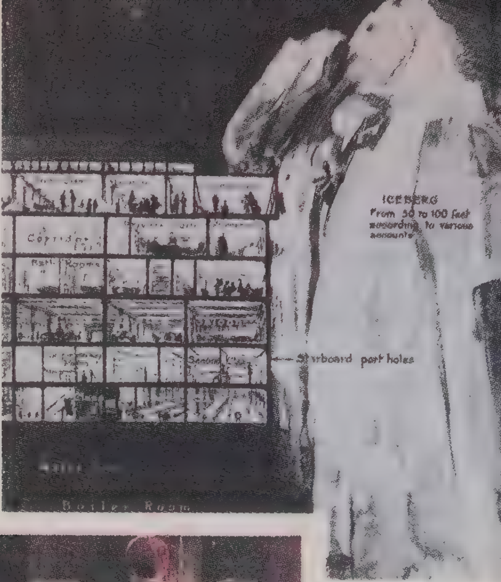
As they boarded, their names and class were taken by a purser stationed at each gangway. Next they were handed to the doctors for a quick medical check. Then on down the line for brandy, coffee, breakfast, blankets, and a bunk. The *Carpathia*'s own first-class passengers gave up their cabins to those who seemed in the greatest need; the ship's public rooms were turned into dormitories for the rest. Not surprisingly, Mrs. Astor, Mrs. Widener, and Mrs. Thayer—Rostron's three most prominent guests—were assigned to his own quarters.

By 8:30 a.m. the last boat had been gathered in. The Leyland liner *Californian* was alongside now, and Rostron asked her to search the area for anyone he might have missed.

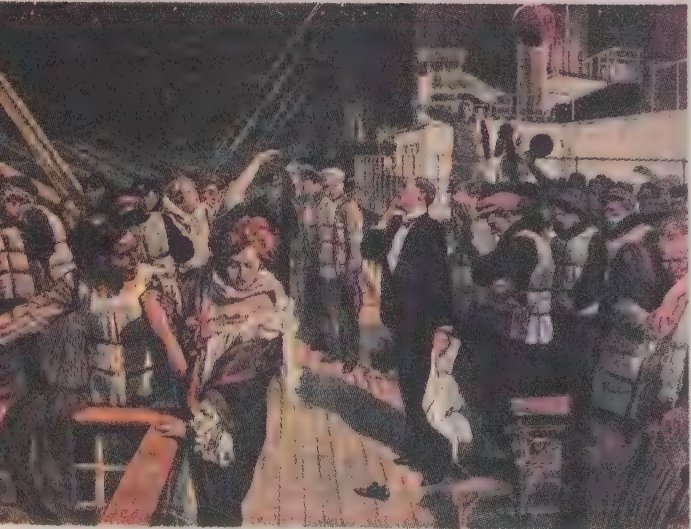
Before leaving the scene, Rostron added one last characteristic touch. As the *Carpathia* passed over the grave of the *Titanic*, rescuers and rescued alike assembled in the first-class dining saloon for a brief service in memory of those who were lost and in thanksgiving for those who were saved.

By the time the *Carpathia* reached New York on the evening of April 18, the city was frantic with anxiety. It was abundantly clear that a dreadful disaster had happened—some fifteen hundred

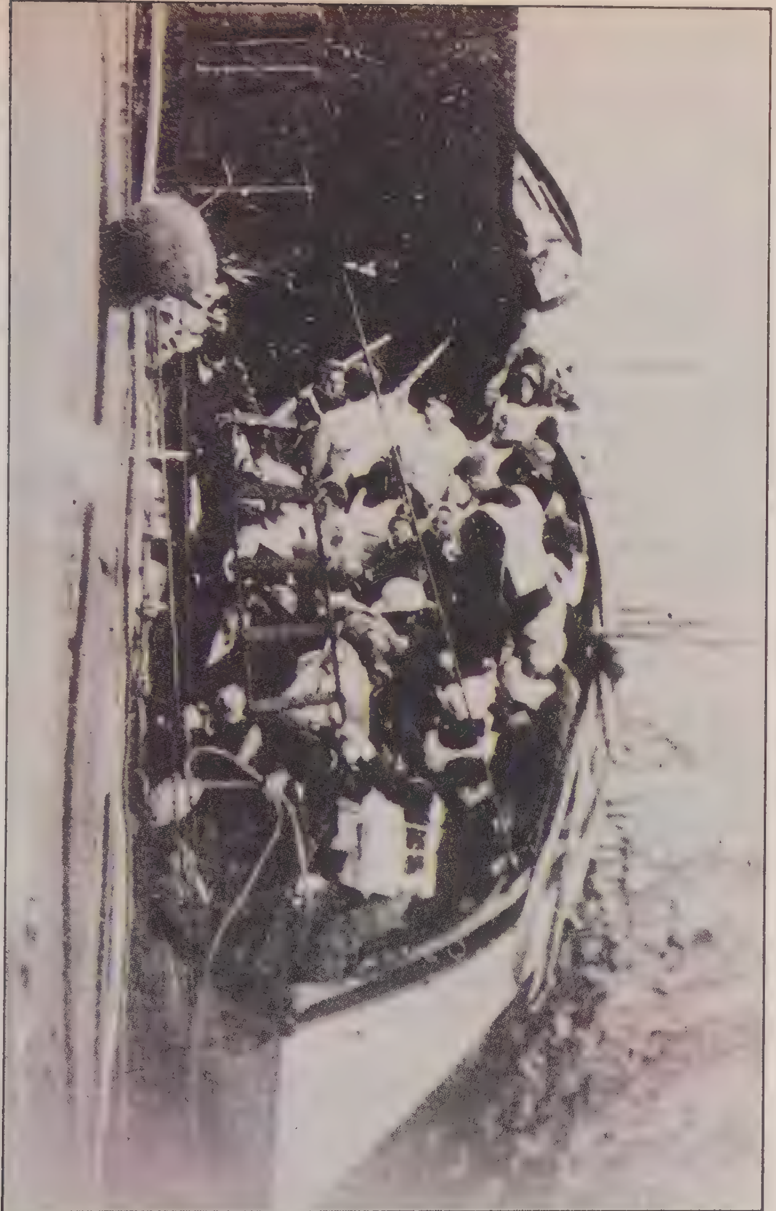
Right: Sunday night, 11:40, the Titanic *scraped an iceberg, ripping her hull, as depicted in this diagram by the magazine* Sphere.


ICEBERG
From 50 to 100 feet according to various accounts
Corridors
Bath Rooms
Second
Starboard port holes
Boiler Room

Below:
Women and Children First,
by an unknown artist



Below: S.S. Carpathia *and her captain, Arthur H. Rostron, "the Electric Spark"*



Above: A Titanic *lifeboat filled with survivors, alongside the rescue ship* Carpathia lives lost—but no one knew much beyond that. The rescue ship's primitive wireless had a range of only two hundred and fifty miles, and her lone operator, Harold Cottam, was exhausted. With Harold Bride's help, he had managed to tap out a list of those saved but not much else. Incoming queries were simply ignored, even a message from President Taft.

As she paused off Ambrose light to pick up a pilot, the *Carpathia* was met by a swarm of tugs, ferries, yachts, and assorted harbor craft. Some carried huge placards bearing the names of missing friends or relatives; others were filled with reporters shouting questions through megaphones. Rostron allowed none aboard, feeling that the survivors were in no shape to be interviewed. When one newsman did manage to jump on the ship, he was promptly collared and put under house arrest on the bridge.

The uproar continued as the *Carpathia* crept up the harbor, and when she again paused, this time to deliver to the White Star Line thirteen of the *Titanic*'s lifeboats, photographers added to the din. Night photography was in its infancy, and to catch the scene it was necessary to set off great blasts of magnesium powder.

To cap the tumult, thunder and lightning rolled across the smoky sky, adding an almost apocalyptic touch to the night. Slowly the *Carpathia* was warped into Pier 54, the survivors began tottering ashore, and at last the world could learn the full story.

Even before he set foot on land, Captain Rostron found himself an instant hero. His calm self-assurance, his acceptance of risks, his faith in God, his enormous accomplishment were all immediately apparent. The paraphernalia of heroism would follow soon—scrolls, testimonial dinners, a medal from Congress struck especially in his honor. The Electric Spark was well on his way to a splendid career that would ultimately see him knighted and named commodore of the whole Cunard fleet.

"A Certain Amount of Slackness"

NINE hours after the *Carpathia*'s turbulent arrival in New York, the Leyland liner *Californian* crept without fanfare into Boston Harbor early on the morning of April 19. No tugs swarmed around her; no press boats jockeyed for position.

The *Californian* was a 6223-ton cargo liner sailing without passengers on the unglamorous Liverpool-Boston run. She had been the second rescue ship to reach the *Titanic*'s position, but it was now known that she carried no survivors. A baseless rumor that she had picked up some bodies accounted for the small knot of ship's reporters waiting silently on her Clyde Street pier.

At 7:00 a.m. the gangplank was lowered, and the local agent of the Leyland Line strode aboard. He went at once to the captain's quarters, where he was closeted for some minutes with the ship's master, Captain Stanley Lord. Then the reporters were allowed on board too, and Captain Lord spoke to the press. He explained that on the evening of April 14–15 the *Californian* had been stopped by a great ice field, that the wireless was shut down for the night, and that she received her first news of the *Titanic* at 5:30 a.m. on the fifteenth from the Allan liner *Virginian*.

Although thirty miles away, Captain Lord told the Boston *Evening Globe*, the *Californian* started for the scene as quickly as possible. "At best it was slow going. At times, nervous as we were, we hardly seemed to be moving. We had to dodge the big bergs, skirt the massed field ice. For three full hours we maneuvered one way or another through the winding channels of the ice."

Most of the reporters were suitably impressed. Only the *Evening Transcript* sensed that all was not quite right. Its man noted that when the reporters asked questions regarding latitude and longitude, Captain Lord said that information would have to come from the company's office. "Ordinarily," the *Transcript*'s reporter observed, "figures giving exact position in latitude and longitude have always been obtainable from the ship's officers."

The paper also wondered about that private meeting between Captain Lord and the company agent just before the newsmen were allowed on board. "Possibly nothing transpired beyond regular routine business. . . ."

Possibly. But far more likely, the reporter's skepticism was sound, for the *Californian*'s voyage had been anything but routine. The complications began on the evening of April 14, during Third Officer Charles V. Groves' 8:00 to 12:00 watch. At 10:21 Groves sighted several white patches in the water ahead, which he took to be a school of porpoises crossing the bows.

Captain Lord knew better. The *Californian* had been warned of ice ahead, and here it was. Lord yanked the engine-room telegraph to FULL SPEED ASTERN. As the ship lost way the white patches turned into flat pieces of field ice, which soon surrounded the vessel completely. There was no telling how far it stretched or how thick it was, but Captain Lord had never been in field ice before, and he was taking no chances. He decided to stick there for the night. Leaving instructions to be called if anything was sighted, he stopped the ship, put the engines on standby, and went below.

Around 11:00 Groves noticed the lights of a steamer coming from the southeast. As it drew closer he decided it was a large passenger ship. It stopped at about 11:40 and seemed to put out many of its lights. Groves remembered serving on a liner where the lights were turned down at midnight to encourage the passengers to go to bed, and he decided that was the case here. It did not occur to him at the time that perhaps the lights only seemed to go out, that actually the ship had made a hard turn to port.

Captain Lord was watching the ship too, from the deck below. "She was something like ourselves—a medium-sized steamer," he reported later. He asked Wireless Operator Cyril Evans what ships were nearby, and Evans said, "Only the *Titanic*." Lord then told him to warn her that the *Californian* was stopped and surrounded by ice. Evans said he had tried but received his famous brush-off from Jack Phillips: "Shut up, shut up. I'm busy. I'm working Cape Race."

At 11:45 Captain Lord joined Groves on the upper bridge, and they briefly conferred about the strange ship. The third officer still believed she was a passenger liner, about ten miles away; the captain thought she was a freighter, maybe five miles away. On Lord's instructions, Groves tried calling her up on the Morse lamp but could get no answer. Then the captain went below again, while Groves continued with his morsing.

At 12:00 Groves handed over the watch to Second Officer Herbert Stone. As Stone made his way to the upper bridge, he met Captain Lord, who pointed out the strange ship and told Stone to let him know at once if she came any closer.

At 12:15 Groves went below, stopping by the wireless room, where he liked to tinker with the set. But Evans was now off duty and ready to sleep, and Groves didn't know how to make the receiver work. He twiddled with the dials for a moment, then gave up and went to bed—thus missing not only a little practice but a chance to catch the *Titanic*'s first call for help.

On the bridge, Stone was joined by a twenty-year-old apprentice named James Gibson, who took over the task of morsing the strange ship. Both men later said she looked like a tramp steamer, although Gibson noted a glare of lights on her afterdeck—a feature not characteristic of a tramp steamer in mid Atlantic.

In a little while Gibson went below on routine duty. For most of the next half hour Stone handled the watch alone. At 12:40 Captain Lord called up on the speaking tube from his cabin, asking whether the other ship was any closer. No, replied Stone, all the same as before. Satisfied, Lord said he was going to the chart room and lie down a bit on the settee.

At 12:45 Stone was startled by the sudden flash of a rocket bursting in the sky over the stranger, sending down a shower of white stars. After several minutes he saw another . . . and another . . . and yet another. Five rockets altogether.

Stone whistled down the speaking tube. Captain Lord got up from the chart-room settee, crossed to his own room, and answered the call. Stone told him about the white rockets. The captain told him to try the Morse lamp again, then returned to the chart room and lay down once more.

Just about this time Apprentice Gibson rejoined Stone on the upper bridge and learned of the five rockets. Gibson went back to the Morse lamp and signaled continuously for three minutes. He then focused his binoculars on her, hoping for an answer. Instead, he saw a sixth rocket: a white detonating flash . . . a faint streak upward into the sky . . . then a burst of white stars.

Stone saw the rocket too. A few minutes later both men saw a seventh and at 1:40 an eighth and final rocket. Through it all—and for another twenty minutes—they talked, puzzled, pondered, and sometimes differed over what they were watching.

"A ship is not going to fire rockets at sea for nothing," Stone observed. The young apprentice agreed. In fact, he thought it was a case of "some sort of distress."

"Have a look at her now, Gibson," Stone broke in. "She seems to look queer now."

Gibson raised his glasses and replied, "She looks rather to have a big side out of the water." She seemed to be listing to starboard, and that glare of lights on her afterdeck looked higher than before. Stone agreed.

Completing the picture, the stranger was now disappearing. Stone said she had begun to steam away to the southwest—the same direction the *Californian* was headed—about the time she fired her first rocket. For a long while she continued to show her red port-side light, but never her green starboard one as might have been expected of a ship steaming off to the southwest.

By 2:00 a.m. she was almost gone. Stone now told Gibson to wake up the captain, tell him that the ship was steaming away to the southwest and had fired eight white rockets altogether.

Gibson went below, entered the chart room, and gave the message to Captain Lord. "All right," the captain said. Then he asked, "Are you sure there were no colors in them?" although regulations at the time for distress signals at night called for rockets throwing stars of any color or description.

"They were all white," Gibson responded.

Lord then asked the time. Gibson replied that it was 2:05.

The captain later said that he had been sleeping heavily and didn't remember any of this conversation, just a vague recollection of Gibson's opening the door, saying something, and then leaving. Gibson was certain that Lord was awake the whole time.

On the bridge again, Stone and Gibson resumed studying the night. Gibson felt the stranger was already gone by 2:05, when he reported to the captain; Stone said she was still faintly in sight until 2:20, then her lights faded away completely.

Around 2:40 he again whistled down the speaking tube. Once more Captain Lord answered the call. Stone told him that there were no more rockets, that the other ship had disappeared into the southwest and was completely out of sight.

At the British inquiry the question arose as to what Stone really meant by *disappeared:* Gone to the bottom or steamed away? Stone maintained that he meant steamed away, but Gibson wouldn't say how he interpreted it.

Stone and Gibson resumed their watch, and nothing happened for the next forty minutes. Then at 3:20 a.m. Gibson suddenly saw a new rocket—more to the south and much farther away than the earlier ones. He reported it to Stone, and the two men watched as a second and then a third rocket burst in the sky. The ship firing them was out of sight below the horizon, but it's worth noting that at this time the *Carpathia* was racing up from the south firing rockets, trying to reassure the *Titanic* that help was coming. Strangely, Stone did not report these new rockets to Captain Lord.

At 4:00 a.m. Chief Officer George F. Stewart arrived on the upper bridge to take over the watch. Stone filled him in on the original eight rockets. Stewart raised his binoculars and spotted to the south a four-masted steamer. He asked Stone if that was the vessel that had been firing the rockets. No, said Stone, adding that this was a brand-new steamer he hadn't seen before.

Stone now went below, leaving the chief officer to sort things out. To every sailor rockets at sea normally mean distress, and Stewart had an uneasy feeling that something had happened. Yet he did nothing until 4:30 a.m., when Captain Lord had asked to be awakened. Stewart did this personally and remarked that Stone had seen rockets during his watch.

"Yes, I know; he's been telling me," replied Lord.

The captain now went on the bridge and explained his plans for getting through the ice and proceeding on to Boston. Stewart asked if he wasn't going to go south first and try to learn something about the ship that had been firing rockets. Lord raised his binoculars and looked at the four-masted steamer. "No," he said. "She looks all right. She's not making any signals now."

But this, of course, was not the ship that Stone had watched. This was the newcomer pointed out by Stewart. Nevertheless, Stewart did not tell the captain that he was looking at the wrong ship.

Little is known of Stewart and Lord's conversation over the next fifty minutes. At the British inquiry Stewart said nothing about it; Lord said only that he learned for the first time that there was more than one rocket—something impossible to reconcile with the accounts of Stone, Gibson, and Stewart.

In any event, at 5:20 life on the *Californian* suddenly took on a much faster pace. Stewart burst into the radio room and shook awake the operator, Cyril Evans: "Wireless, there's a ship been firing rockets in the night. Will you see if you can find out what is wrong—what is the matter?"

Evans bolted out of bed and flicked on the set. One after another the *Mount Temple*, the *Frankfurt*, and the *Virginian* told him about the *Titanic*, and at 5:45 he had an official message from the *Virginian* giving him the *Titanic*'s position—41°46′ north, 50°14′ west—about nineteen miles away from the *Californian*.

By 6:00–6:15 Captain Lord had the *Californian* under way, but for the first three or four miles she crept through heavy field ice. By 7:00 she was in open water and steaming south at thirteen knots, her full speed. Around 7:30 Captain Lord calculated he was at the *Titanic*'s position, but he found only the *Mount Temple*. She too had found nothing, but both ships could see the *Carpathia* stopped five or six miles to the east.

Wireless traffic indicated that the *Carpathia* was picking up the *Titanic*'s boats, so Captain Lord headed for her. There was too much ice to steer a direct course; therefore, the *Californian* continued south until she found a channel in the ice, then wriggled through it. By 8:30 the *Californian* was alongside the *Carpathia*, just in time to watch Captain Rostron pick up boat 12, the last of the *Titanic*'s lifeboats. The two ships exchanged signals by wigwag, with the *Californian* agreeing to continue the search while the *Carpathia* headed back for New York.

It was a disheartening search—no more survivors, not even any victims in sight. Just seven abandoned lifeboats, some planks, deck chairs, and a number of green cushions floating around.

The *Californian* gave up the search and headed for Boston. When she arrived, on the morning of April 19, the party line was that no one had seen anything—no rockets, no lights, nothing unusual on the night of the fourteenth to the fifteenth.

For a while the strategy worked. The Boston press virtually ignored the *Californian* on April 21, 22, and 23. She lay quietly at her Clyde Street pier, discharging and taking on cargo.

Yet behind the scenes the waterfront seethed with excitement. It turned out that besides Stone and Gibson, Ernest Gill, assistant on one of the ship's donkey engines, had watched the rockets while out on deck taking a midnight smoke. Also Evans, Stone, and Gibson, though silent now, had talked a lot during the days just before the ship reached Boston. Secondhand versions of their experiences spread through the dockside bars.

On April 21 the ship's carpenter, W. F. McGregor, visited a cousin in Clinton, Massachusetts, and could contain himself no longer. A reporter from the Clinton *Daily Item* was present, and on the twenty-third the paper broke the story. It told how the watch on the *Californian* saw the rockets sent up by the *Titanic.*

Two days passed before the Boston papers picked up the *Daily Item*'s scoop, but rumors continued to spread. On the twenty-fourth the *Post* finally caught a whiff and published an interview with Captain Lord, who said the *Californian* was only twenty miles away but sighted "no rockets or other signals of distress."

On the twenty-fifth the Boston *American* exploded a bombshell that went beyond mere gossip. The paper carried a sworn affidavit, signed by the assistant donkeyman Ernest Gill, relating what he had seen on the night of April 14–15. Gill's affidavit declared that shortly before midnight he had noticed the lights of a big steamer about ten miles away. He went below but couldn't sleep. Coming back on deck for a smoke, he saw no sign of the steamer, but on the horizon in the same general direction he watched two white rockets burst in the sky. He did not report this to the bridge because "they could not have helped but see them."

"A lie" . . . "bosh" . . . "poppycock," Captain Lord told various interviewers, noting that Gill had been paid five hundred dollars for his account. Officers Stewart and Stone backed the skipper up.

By now the show had moved to Washington. On the twenty-fifth Captain Lord, Wireless Operator Evans, and Gill himself were all summoned to testify at Senate hearings. Putting the evidence together, the committee quickly found that the *Californian* was less than nineteen miles away, saw the *Titanic*'s rockets, and "failed to respond to them in accordance with the dictates of humanity, international usage, and the requirements of law."

Meanwhile, in England, the British inquiry had learned of the charges made by the *Californian*'s conscience-stricken carpenter, McGregor. Ultimately the court heard the accounts of all the characters in the drama, and concluded: "There are inconsistencies and contradictions in the story as told by the different witnesses, but the truth of the matter is plain. . . . When she first saw the rockets, the *Californian* could have pushed through the ice to the open water without any serious risk and so have come to the assistance of the *Titanic*. Had she done so, she might have saved many if not all of the lives that were lost."

To the end of his days Captain Lord insisted that the *Titanic* gave the wrong position—that she was really much farther away, on the other side of an impenetrable ice field. From time to time he asked that the case be reopened, but no new grounds for any appeal were found, and there the matter stood.

Estimates of distances at sea, the timing of incidents, the position and bearings of ships to one another are by their very nature imprecise. But the one element that lifts the night of April 14–15 out of the realm of the imponderable is the incontrovertible fact of the rockets. It's a waste of time to linger over the question of what Stone and Gibson thought the rockets meant. The real question is why, when they were reported to Captain Lord, he did nothing about them.

It must always be remembered that when he made up his mind to stay put, Captain Lord had no inkling that a disaster was about to occur. He only knew there was a lot of ice out there, and the safe thing to do was to stop for the night. This was the right decision—provided nothing happened. But something did happen, and Captain Lord's failure was his inability or unwillingness to adjust to an entirely new situation. True, he had his own ship and crew to think about, but that was no excuse for doing nothing when the rockets went up. What was good seamanship before the rockets became a woeful lack of enterprise afterward.

It did not have to be that way. Captain Rostron of the *Carpathia*, the Electric Spark, proved that. But the *Californian* was different—a plodding cargo liner presided over by a cautious captain and an uninspired watch. Six months after the British inquiry, Captain Lord wrote a letter to his Parliament member. In it he admitted there was "a certain amount of slackness aboard the *Californian* the night in question." Slackness is a word that could well serve as an epitaph for the performance of the whole ship that night—including her captain.

Second-guessing

THE bronzed men of the sea were soon gone from the stage, their place taken by a pallid cast of lawyers, bureaucrats, technical experts, and—eventually—historians. Even before the *Carpathia* reached New York, voices were rising in Washington, demanding to know how such a catastrophe could happen.

The chorus was led by Senator William Alden Smith, a man whose constituency had nothing to do with the sea; he was a railroad lawyer from Grand Rapids, Michigan. But Smith knew that this hot political issue could give him instant national exposure.

The *Titanic* had flown the British flag, but her ownership was about as British as U.S. Steel. In 1902 American financier J. Pierpont Morgan had formed the International Mercantile Marine, a huge shipping trust that now controlled the White Star Line. Senator Smith liked playing the role of a rough, unpolished country boy taking on the city slickers, and White Star's combination of British merchants and Wall Street financiers may have been too good a target to resist.

Smith quickly rammed through the Senate a resolution directing the Committee on Commerce to name a subcommittee to investigate the disaster. To no one's surprise Smith headed it up. There was no time to lose before the lost liner's crew returned home and were out of U.S. jurisdiction, so Smith and the subcommittee members immediately headed for New York with subpoena powers and a small army of marshals.

At 10:30 on the morning of April 19, the day after the *Carpathia* arrived in New York, Smith opened the proceedings in the Waldorf-Astoria hotel's East Room. Bruce Ismay, the White Star chairman, had agreed to appear, and Smith called him as the first witness. Would he kindly give the committee any information he thought might be helpful, telling the story "as succinctly as possible."

Ismay quickly showed how succinct he could be. "I was in bed myself, asleep, when the accident happened," he explained. "The ship sank, I am told, at two twenty. That, sir, I think is all I can tell you."

Unfazed, Smith asked what Ismay did after the impact, and the White Star chairman realized that he was in for a grilling.

It would eventually add up to fifty-eight pages of testimony.

The British press viewed the Senate investigation first with disbelief and then with dismay. What were those cheeky Americans doing investigating a British family matter anyhow? The fact that the *Titanic* was serving American ports and soliciting American passengers seemed to make little difference. And the fact that, after piercing the corporate veil, the White Star Line was basically an American-owned company was never even mentioned.

Nor did Smith help his cause as the investigation unfolded. He showed almost total ignorance of ships and the sea, once asking a witness, "Did the *Titanic* go down by the head or the bow?"

"A born fool" concluded the London press. There was a general feeling that things would be different when the British launched their own inquiry into the tragedy.

The British inquiry was a special court headed by Lord Mersey. Although Mersey was an experienced judge, his field was commercial law, and he had served as president of the Probate, Divorce, and Admiralty Division of the High Court for only a year. Yet he was shrewd, witty, and possessed the kind of legal mind that could readily assimilate the facts of a complicated case.

The inquiry opened May 2 at the London Scottish Drill Hall, the only available place big enough to hold all who had reason to come. For thirty-six days the story of the *Titanic* unfolded again, as a parade of witnesses were examined by more than fifty lawyers representing such varied interests as the White Star Line, the third-class passengers, and the owners and officers of the *Californian*. Through it all, Lord Mersey remained in firm command. The British inquiry differed in an important way from the rough-and-tumble of the Senate's investigation. It put much more emphasis on the technical side of the disaster: the faulty design of the *Titanic*, the outdated lifeboat regulations, the casual acceptance of inadequate boat drill, the reckless navigation practiced by shipmasters in the competitive struggle on the North Atlantic run.

In contrast, the Senate investigation concentrated much more heavily on what might be called the human side of the disaster. Not counting Bruce Ismay, some twenty passengers from all three classes gave testimony, throwing a great deal of light on such pertinent points as the way the alarm was spread after the colli-

"Our coterie" member Helen Churchill Candee

Bandmaster Wallace Hartley

Bruce Ismay, chairman of the White Star Line

Below: Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon (standing) testifies before a crowd-packed hearing room at the British inquiry. His lifeboat, capacity forty persons, left the Titanic *with only twelve.*

sion, the amount of warning given, the mustering for the boats, the different procedures followed on the port and starboard sides, the varying treatment accorded each of the three classes.

In the end the American and the British approaches complemented each other, together throwing a great deal of light on the disaster. Both inquiries reached similar conclusions. They decided that the *Titanic* was going too fast; that a good and proper lookout was not kept; that there was poor organization in loading and lowering the lifeboats; that the *Californian* was in sight, saw the rockets, and could have come; that there was no discrimination against third class.

Both inquiries recommended that passenger vessels should carry lifeboats for all, that there should be better and more frequent boat drills, that wireless operators should be on duty twenty-four hours a day, that steps should be taken to improve the watertight integrity of the liners that were now sailing the seas.

In both investigations the findings on third class were curious. It is perhaps understandable that Lord Mersey saw no discrimination. Mr. W. D. Harbinson, officially representing third-class interests, did not call on a single steerage survivor to testify, and he personally assured the court that there was "not an atom or a tittle of evidence" that anyone in third class was held back.

Less understandable were the findings of the Senate investigation. Of the three third-class witnesses examined, two clearly stated that members of the crew tried to keep them below. Yet it must be conceded that they also said they did not believe they had been discriminated against. One can only conclude that steerage aspirations were low: in 1912 it was enough to be given a life belt.

The biggest difference between the two reports was on the question of Captain Smith's blame. He was so beloved—and faced his end so bravely—that it seemed brutal to criticize him at all. Senator Smith blamed the captain as gently as he could:

> Captain Smith knew the sea, and his clear eye and steady hand had often guided his ship through dangerous paths. . . . His indifference to danger was one of the direct and contributing causes to this unnecessary tragedy. Overconfidence seems to have dulled the faculties usually so alert.

The White Star Line paraded eleven sea captains before the British court, all of whom testified that when there was ice ahead and the weather was good, they always went full speed until the ice was sighted. In contrast to Senator Smith, Lord Mersey concluded:

> I am not able to blame Captain Smith. . . . He was doing only that which other skilled men would have done in the same position. He made a mistake, a very grievous mistake, but one in which, in face of the practice and of past experience, negligence cannot be said to have had any part; and in the absence of negligence it is, in my opinion, impossible to fix Captain Smith with blame.

The whole question of blame was becoming more important, for the damage claims were now piling up. Ultimately they totaled some sixteen million dollars—which works out at about $176,000,000 in today's terms. It was a staggering sum in 1912.

The claims for loss of life were especially revealing. The highest was for a million dollars, filed by the widow of Henry B. Harris, the Broadway theater owner and producer. His magic touch was a unique gift that Mrs. Harris felt she could not replace.

At the opposite extreme, some of the wealthiest and most socially prominent families sought nothing at all. In 1912 it seemed somehow demeaning to put a price tag on a gentleman's life.

As the claims poured in, the White Star Line's New York attorney, Charles C. Burlingham, faced the avalanche with a powerful defensive weapon—the doctrine of limited liability. Both American and British law had long given special protection to shipowners whose vessels, through negligent handling, caused damage to others. The risks of sending ships to sea were so great that some special incentive was needed if maritime nations were to grow and prosper. On land, the factory owner could theoretically oversee the acts of his employees; but since the shipowner was usually out of touch with his captain and crew, it seemed unfair to hold him to the same degree of responsibility when something went wrong. Therefore, as long as he did not have "privity or knowledge" of the negligence, his liability would be limited.

On June 22, 1915, the case finally came to trial. Speaking as the

White Star's chief attorney, C. C. Burlingham took the position that there was no negligence at all, but if there was, it was not the owners who were to blame; their liability should be limited to $97,772.12. This figure represented the amount of damages as prescribed under American law, which was the total value of salvage (thirteen lifeboats) plus the money paid in by shippers and passengers who were never carried to their destinations.

The claimants fought back, arguing that there was indeed negligence in the handling of the ship, and the owners had a share in it through the presence of Bruce Ismay on board. The picture was conjured up of the meeting before lunch on that fatal Sunday when Captain Smith handed Ismay the *Baltic*'s ice warning and Ismay stuffed it into his pocket. Surely, the claimants contended, that constituted "privity or knowledge" of the negligence, removing the owners from the protection of limited liability. Final arguments were heard July 27–29, and Judge Julius M. Mayer began his consideration of the case.

On the surface life settled down to a long period of silent waiting. But beneath the surface all was activity. The country was in a progressive mood, and to many people $97,772 seemed a scandalously low price for the owners of the *Titanic* to pay. Who initiated the step is uncertain, but lawyers for both sides began quietly conferring in an effort to find some acceptable compromise. The claimants gradually scaled down their demands from the original sixteen million dollars to less than three million, while White Star began inching up the $97,772 it owed under limited liability.

On December 17, 1915, Burlingham announced that the parties were near settlement. White Star agreed to pay $664,000, to be apportioned among the claimants. In return the claimants would drop all suits and agree that the White Star Line had no "privity or knowledge" of any negligence. This last constituted an acknowledgment that the ship's owners were indeed protected by limited liability, and presumably barred any suits in the future. The lawyers for nearly all the claimants went along with the deal.

Much of the next six months was spent trying to divide up equitably the $664,000. The maximum allowed, for instance, would be fifty thousand dollars for loss of life under certain conditions—which meant that Mrs. Harris had to come down quite a bit from the one million she originally claimed. On the other hand, the cut was far less severe for loss of life in steerage. The average claim had been fifteen hundred dollars; the average award would be one thousand.

On July 28, 1916, the settlement was formally signed and sealed. After four years, three months, one week, and six days, the litigation over the *Titanic* was at last a closed book.

Survivors

THE damage claims were now a closed book, but not the story of the human beings who survived the *Titanic*. Many would find their lives permanently intertwined with the disaster.

Bruce Ismay would never live it down. As chairman and managing director of the White Star Line, he was ultimately responsible for the shortage of lifeboats, yet he went off in a boat, leaving hundreds stranded on the sloping decks. Captain Smith, people felt, at least had the good grace to go down with the ship. In Chicago a young newspaperman named Ben Hecht put the contrast into a verse, which contained these lines:

The Captain stood where the captain should
When a captain's boat goes down.
But the owner led when the women fled
For an owner must not drown.

Ismay had his troubles with British critics too. In a feisty open letter appearing in the journal *John Bull*, editor Horace Bottomley asked him, "How is it that you, above all people, were in one of the lifeboats? . . . Your place was at the captain's side till every man, woman, and child was safely off the ship." Most of the criticism, however, was in a lower key. "It is not given to everyone to be a hero," remarked *Nautical Magazine*.

In the end the British inquiry exonerated him. Lord Mersey found that Ismay was under no moral obligation to stick with the ship, but Ismay remained under a cloud. On June 30, 1913, he retired as chairman of the White Star Line and began an ever increasing withdrawal from public life. He spent much of his time at a secluded estate and never traveled to America again. On October 17, 1937, he died of a stroke at his home in London.

Ismay's most vocal American defender was first-class passenger Billy Carter of Philadelphia, but this proved a mixed blessing. Carter was the only other male passenger in collapsible C. And speculation about him increased when Mrs. Carter sued for divorce in January 1914. The grounds for her suit were "cruel and barbarous treatment and indignities to the person," and one passage of her testimony in particular caught the public's eye:

> When the *Titanic* struck, my husband came to our stateroom and said, "Get up and dress yourself and the children." I never saw him again until I arrived at the *Carpathia* at eight o'clock the next morning, when I saw him leaning on the rail. All he said was that he had had a jolly good breakfast, and that he never thought I would make it.

Carter denied all charges, stressing that he had had his wife and children placed in a boat before he and Ismay jumped into collapsible C to help with the rowing. However, the British inquiry had established that collapsible C left the *Titanic* some fifteen minutes before Mrs. Carter and the children went in boat 4.

William T. Sloper of New Britain, Connecticut, was another first-class survivor who had some explaining to do. On April 19, the day after the *Carpathia* reached port, the New York *Journal* identified Sloper as that instant *Titanic* celebrity, "the man who got off dressed as a woman."

Actually, there's no supporting evidence whatsoever. Sloper left the *Titanic* in number 7, the first boat loaded. At that time few thought the danger was serious, and the boat was lowered with only twenty-eight persons—less than half its capacity. For a man to go in boat 7, there was no reason to dress as a woman.

The story can be traced to an incident on the night the *Carpathia* got back to New York. Sloper was met at the pier by his brother Harold and his father, Andrew Jackson Sloper. They whisked him by taxi to the Waldorf-Astoria, where he was the first survivor to register. Soon the corridor outside his room was packed with reporters. Sloper didn't want to see them, and when Harold Sloper repelled them a little too forcefully, the *Journal*'s man decided the Slopers had to be taught a little respect for the press: his story put William Sloper in women's clothing.

Sloper spent many an hour in the years after, explaining how he really escaped from the *Titanic*. Others too have been identified as the man who got off dressed as a woman. All are in the clear, but none fought back, and a cloud hovers over their names even today.

Sir Cosmo and Lady Duff Gordon also lived in the shadow of the *Titanic* for the rest of their days. They had left the ship in boat 1, capacity forty, which pulled away with only twelve people, then failed to heed the cries from the water after the ship sank. It was rumored that Sir Cosmo had bribed the boat crew not to row back.

Lord Mersey exonerated him but observed that Sir Cosmo might have shown a little more initiative. Instead of doing nothing, he could have led an effort to rescue some of the swimmers.

He just wasn't the type. Sir Cosmo came from a life of comfort and privilege, and he seemed totally oblivious to ordinary people. It never occurred to him that somebody might misinterpret the gift of five pounds that he presented to each member of his boat crew. When servants do a good job, you tip them. Nor did he have any inkling that it might be in bad taste to have a festive champagne supper at the Ritz after the *Carpathia* landed.

Still, one must carry on. Sir Cosmo lived the life he had always led—proud, aloof. But his wife felt that the storm of censure that swirled around him broke his heart. He died in April 1931.

For Mrs. Henry B. Harris the disaster led to a whole new life. Henry B., as she always called her husband, had been one of Broadway's most successful producers. When he died, the dollars stopped; hence her million-dollar claim. When this was whittled down to fifty thousand dollars, her prospects looked bleak, since it was generally understood that women had no place in the business end of the theater.

But why not? Henry B. had often depended on her quick, intuitive mind. Moreover, she already had a theater—the choice Hudson on West Forty-fourth Street. So she blazed a trail and became Broadway's first woman producer.

Helen Churchill Candee was another *Titanic* survivor who managed to cope with adversity. "Our coterie," as Colonel Gracie had called her little circle of shipboard swains, was forever shattered: Colley, Kent, and Clinch Smith drowned; Gracie died from the aftereffects within nine months; only Hugh Woolner and Bjornstrom Steffanson survived. As far as can be determined, she was never again in touch with either of them.

Mrs. Candee published a book on tapestry in 1913, receiving a fine review in the *Times*. During the '20s she carved out a new career as a travel lecturer on exotic places. China and Southeast Asia were her specialties, and her book *Angkor, the Magnificent* earned her decorations from both the French government and the King of Cambodia. She remained active until just before her death at the age of ninety in York Harbor, Maine.

Many *Titanic* widows soon remarried. Besides Mrs. Harris, the list included prominent names like Mrs. Astor, Mrs. Widener, and Mrs. Ryerson. Mrs. Lucien P. Smith's new husband was Robert Daniel, a fellow survivor whom she met on the *Carpathia*.

What about the *Titanic*'s surviving officers? In view of their splendid discipline that last night—and their loyalty to White Star on the witness stand—one might suppose they enjoyed steady promotion, crowned by a command as their just reward.

It didn't work out that way. No officer from the *Titanic* ever achieved his own command, no matter how brave or loyal he might have been. The White Star Line was determined to take no step that might remind the traveling public of its darkest hour.

Unlocking the Ocean's Secret

"SHE's gone; that's the last of her," someone lamented in boat 13 as the sea closed over the flagstaff on the *Titanic*'s stern. Actually, it was anything but the last of her. Figuratively, she would always be afloat, gripping the world's imagination for years to come. Literally, she would be seen again seventy-three years later, thanks to the miracle of modern technology.

Men began dreaming up ways to find and raise the *Titanic* right from the start. Electromagnetism had much popular appeal in those primitive days before high tech. One plan, which apparently never got further than the Sunday-supplement pages, called for magnets to be fastened to the sunken *Titanic* and attached by cable to empty pontoons rising above the hulk like a cluster of circus balloons. When enough pontoons had been added, presumably the ship would come popping up.

Two world wars, the carefree '20s, and the Depression '30s put a temporary end to such schemes. No one had the time or inclination to dive on the *Titanic*.

The '50s saw the first flicker of renewed interest. In July 1953 the British salvage vessel *Help* slipped out of Southampton harbor and headed for the *Titanic*'s position. Here the *Help* began underwater blasting with heavy explosives. It seems likely that the operators hoped to blow open the *Titanic*'s hull and search for some of the treasure rumored to be inside. But nothing was found—not even a trace of the ship.

The '60s brought a dramatic surge of activity. It was a time of great technological advances. Men conquered space, went to the moon—and there was a parallel, if less spectacular, leap forward in our ability to explore the world beneath the sea.

In 1966 Douglas Woolley, an English factory worker who knew nothing about oceanography, announced his plans for raising the lost liner. He had no scientific training, no experience in salvage, no financial resources; but he did have an obsession about finding the *Titanic*. He also had a remarkable knack for getting his plans into the newspapers.

As reported in the press, Woolley originally planned to find the *Titanic* by means of a bathyscaphe, and then raise her with nylon balloons attached to her hull. For a while it seemed as if something might actually come of Woolley's dreams. Two Hungarian inventors turned up with a plan that looked, on paper at least, impressively scientific. An admittedly shadowy group of West German investors promised the necessary capital. And finally even a boat was obtained, which Woolley thought could be turned into a salvage vessel.

Then all began to unravel. A scholarly paper by an American chemistry professor showed that the plan might take ten years. The West German investors never materialized, and the boat turned out to be a dud. Gradually the whole project evaporated.

But Douglas Woolley did achieve one thing. He started a lot more people thinking about finding the *Titanic*. During the 1970s at least eight different groups planned to locate and even raise the ship. There was no limit to their ingenuity. One plan called for 180,000 tons of molten wax to be pumped into the vessel. The buoyancy of the wax would lift the *Titanic* to the surface. Another plan involved injecting thousands of Ping-Pong balls into the hull. Yet another would encase the liner in ice. Like an ordinary cube in a drink, the ice would rise to the surface, bringing the *Titanic* with it. All the plans, however, suffered from a common fault: they cost too much. Just mounting Woolley's expedition could easily run over a million dollars.

Nor was it a sure thing even then, for the exact position of the *Titanic* remained uncertain. The odds makers put the chances of finding the ship at less than fifty to sixty percent.

In 1980 these odds were good enough for Jack Grimm, a wealthy Texas wildcat oilman. He had sponsored expeditions in search of Noah's ark, the Loch Ness monster, and the legendary Bigfoot. Now, when the *Titanic* was suggested as a new project, Grimm quickly agreed. He talked up the project at the Petroleum Club in his hometown, Abilene, and got some of his poker-playing buddies to take a piece of the action. He hired a publicity agency to handle TV, movie, and serialization rights.

Above all, he won respectability. In a deal with Columbia University, Grimm gave $330,000 to the Lamont-Doherty Geological Observatory for a wide-sweep sonar rig, and in return got five years' exclusive use of the equipment plus the services of the technical personnel needed to run it. But three expeditions, in 1980, 1981, and 1983, sent Grimm's searchers home empty-handed.

Aware of these fruitless efforts, the press paid little attention when another group set out to find the *Titanic* in the summer of 1985. The sponsor was the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, the ship was the institution's research vessel *Knorr*, and the leader was Dr. Robert D. Ballard, a personable forty-two-year-old geologist who headed up the institution's Deep Submergence Laboratory. The expedition—its ungainly-looking boat loaded with mysterious hardware—appeared to be like all the others.

A total of forty-nine people were aboard, including twenty-four scientists. Leaving the Azores on August 15, they headed not northwest for the *Titanic* but southeast for the position of the U.S.

nuclear submarine *Scorpion*, mysteriously lost with all hands in 1968. They spent the seventeenth taking pictures of the sunken sub, and if these photographs throw any new light on what happened to her, this could well be the most important accomplishment of the entire expedition.

Then on to the search area, a 150-square-mile block of sea, based on the *Titanic*'s last given position. Some eighty percent of this area had been combed earlier by the French government's research vessel *Le Suroit*, for this was a joint Franco-American venture, manned by scientists from both countries. The main American contribution was a unique video camera system built into a deep-towed vehicle called Argo, while the French contributed a revolutionary side-scanning sonar vehicle named SAR, which could examine the ocean floor in swaths three fifths of a mile wide—far beyond the limits of anything previously invented.

In keeping with the partnership concept, Bob Ballard had been on *Le Suroit* during July, working with her team of scientists. They had spent six weeks "mowing the lawn"—as the oceanographers described the path back and forth over the area—until *Le Suroit* finally ran out of time and had to go home. Now Jean Jarry, director of the French effort, was serving on the *Knorr* with two of his group.

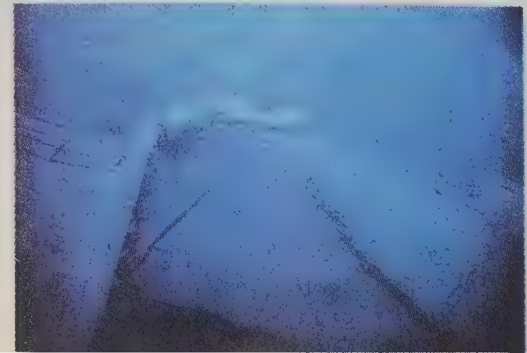
Arriving on the scene August 22, the *Knorr* took over where *Le Suroit* left off. Behind her and nearly thirteen thousand feet down she towed Argo. Roughly the size of an automobile, it carried five television cameras, pointing ahead, downward, and sideways, along with sonar, sensors, computerized timing equipment, and banks of powerful strobe lights. Overall, the contraption was virtually a robot, managed by scientists more than two miles above, sitting in the relative comfort of the *Knorr*'s control room.

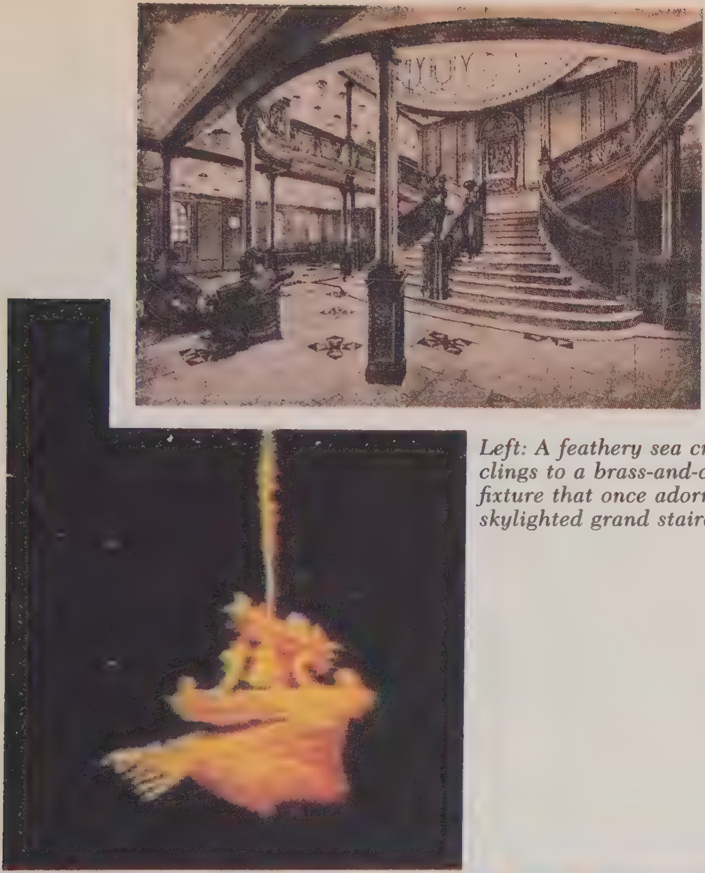
The night of August 31 to September 1 began like all the others. The *Knorr* crept slowly along the path of the search pattern, deep-towing Argo as usual. In the control room a seven-man watch under Bob Ballard dutifully monitored the video screens, but there was nothing interesting to look at—just miles of mud. At midnight Ballard's group was relieved by the 12:00 to 4:00 watch under Jean-Louis Michel, one of the French scientists. Ballard went below for a shower and some rest.

Above: Jason Jr., the latest deep-sea robot to photograph the Titanic *12,500 feet underwater*

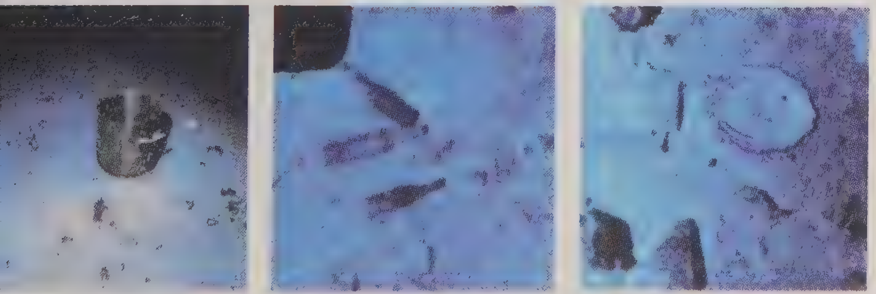
Right: Railing and brass-rimmed porthole alongside the Titanic*'s bow*

Below: Gaping hole on deck, once covered by the grand stairway's ornate glass dome (see opposite, above)





Left: A feathery sea creature clings to a brass-and-crystal light fixture that once adorned the skylighted grand staircase (above).



Remnants of the Titanic's opulence lie in debris on the ocean floor: copper pot (left), wine bottles (middle), silver platter (right).

Shortly before 1:00, small chunks of metal debris suddenly began showing up on the screens. "You'd better go and get Bob," Michel ordered, but the group in the control room seemed riveted to the spot. Finally someone persuaded the cook to go, and he brought back Ballard in time to see a large metal cylinder appear on the video tube at 1:05.

It was clearly a boiler and unmistakably a boiler from the *Titanic*. Nothing else could have that particular arrangement of three stoking doors at one end. Ballard's team had studied pictures of those boilers for months—and now they had found one.

It was only the beginning. The scientists estimated that the debris trail ran for nearly six hundred yards, with a huge shadowy solid object at the end. But they would not find out what it was tonight. The debris had now become so thick that Ballard feared Argo might become entangled in some piece of rigging and be damaged or lost. Playing it safe, he ordered the unit to be hauled up.

At 1:40 someone observed that it was close to the time of night when the *Titanic* had made her final plunge. Ballard invited the group to join him on the fantail for a brief memorial service.

Next morning a sonar check indicated that it was safe for Argo to go back to work, and it soon became clear that the huge shadowy object at the end of the debris trail was the forepart of the *Titanic*. She was in astonishingly good shape. When last seen that April night in 1912, the ship was plunging headfirst, almost straight down, but somehow she had nearly leveled off, and she now sat upright, with just a slight list.

The *Titanic*'s appearance was surprisingly pristine, with little of the marine growth that usually sprouts all over a sunken vessel. At thirteen thousand feet it was too dark and too cold for anything to grow. Only a thin film of silt covered the ship. The clarity was so great that dozens of objects could be identified amid the debris alongside the ship: lumps of coal, luggage, beds, bottles of wine miraculously unbroken, a silver platter, a chamber pot. The sharpness of detail gave the disaster an immediacy that sobered even the excitement of discovery.

For the next five days the *Knorr* cruised back and forth over the *Titanic*'s grave, deep-towing Argo behind her. Argo videotaped the wreck from every angle, and later a deep-towed camera sled named ANGUS made a series of passes using cameras loaded with color film. They covered most of the forward end of the ship and far enough aft to learn that the stern was missing. Pictures taken by ANGUS on the fifth day caught debris from the missing section, about eight hundred feet aft of the rest of the wreck. But then Argo had a narrow escape when it brushed against the wreck while making a turn.

Perhaps Ballard felt that he had stretched his luck enough. The rest could wait until he returned the next year. In any case, September 5 was the last day of filming. The *Knorr* turned for Woods Hole and a noisy welcome of klaxons and air horns.

Why did this effort succeed when all the others failed? First of all, there was the equipment. Argo's side-scanning sonar, for instance, could cover as much ground in twenty days as previously took twelve years. Money was another factor. Even a wealthy Texan couldn't match the combined resources of the French government, the U.S. Navy, the National Science Foundation, and the National Geographic Society. The Office of Naval Research alone committed 2.8 million dollars to the Argo-Jason project. Altogether, it's estimated that the expedition cost six million dollars, with a possible total of fifteen million if a follow-up trip is made in August 1987.

Another advantage was Ballard himself. He not only had a Ph.D. in marine geology and geophysics, he was also a diver with much practical experience in deep-sea submersibles. And he had been hooked on the *Titanic* for years. As early as 1978, according to an article appearing that year in the Washington *Post*, he was involved with Seaonics International Ltd., "a firm formed with the express purpose of finding the *Titanic*." Added to these assets was the intuition that seems to guide successful inventors and explorers. As one colleague put it, "Bob has an extraordinary ability to find interesting things on the bottom."

But his most striking quality was a sensitivity that verged on piety. It was there the night the *Titanic* was found and he held that brief service on the *Knorr*'s fantail. It was there at the press conference in Washington after the *Knorr*'s return, in the closing lines of his formal statement:

> The *Titanic* itself lies in thirteen thousand feet of water on a gently sloping alpinelike countryside overlooking a small canyon below. . . . It is quiet and peaceful and a fitting place for the remains of this greatest of sea tragedies to rest. Forever may it remain that way and may God bless these now found souls.

A noble thought, but forever is a long, long while. Pompeii was once the scene of an enormous human tragedy, King Tutankhamen's tomb was a sacred grave; but today they are tourist attractions. The same sort of fate must ultimately overtake the *Titanic*. Although a resolution passed by the House of Representatives urges that the wreck be designated a maritime memorial, the sea belongs to no one, and there are few funds for guarding a patch of ocean.

The danger lies not in man's greed but in his curiosity. By now nearly everyone knows that no great treasure is tucked away somewhere in the *Titanic*. Her cargo manifest lists ordinary goods worth less than $500,000; the passengers' jewelry was impressive, but not spectacular. Nor is there any practical chance of raising the *Titanic* for commercial purposes.

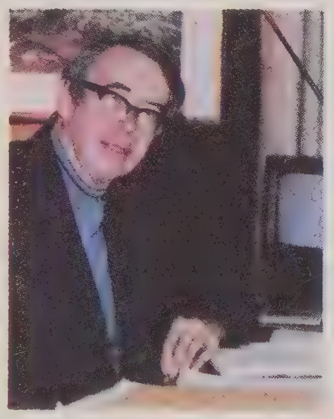
But the lure of the ship remains, if only because it is there. As new technology makes the *Titanic* ever more accessible, all that is left to protect her is a human sense of propriety. Designating the wreck as a maritime memorial is not enough.

Maybe it doesn't really matter. Those who fall under the spell of that famous night will always have their own favorite vignette as a special memorial—perhaps the band, or the Strauses, or the eight Goodwins clinging together. And there will always be the memory of that last glimpse of the *Titanic* as she stood in 1912—stern high, her black silhouette pointing like an accusing finger at the stars, then gliding slowly out of sight, leaving her handful of lifeboats alone in the empty sea.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walter Lord has been fascinated by sea disasters since childhood. In 1927, when he was nine, an Italian liner sank on its way from Genoa to South America. "Photos taken by a rescue ship so intrigued me," says Lord, "that from then on I kept a scrapbook on any ships that sank at sea. Of them all, clearly the *Titanic* was the flagship of this doomed fleet."

Born and raised in Baltimore, Lord graduated from Princeton University and later served in the Office of Strategic Services during World War II. "I wasn't dropped behind the lines," he says, laughing. "I held the cloaks of the people wearing the cloaks and daggers." After the war, Lord moved to New York City, and while employed as an advertising copywriter, he wrote *A Night to Remember*. Published in 1955, this now classic account of the *Titanic* tragedy was a runaway best seller. Since then Lord has written on many historical topics, including Pearl Harbor and the Alamo.

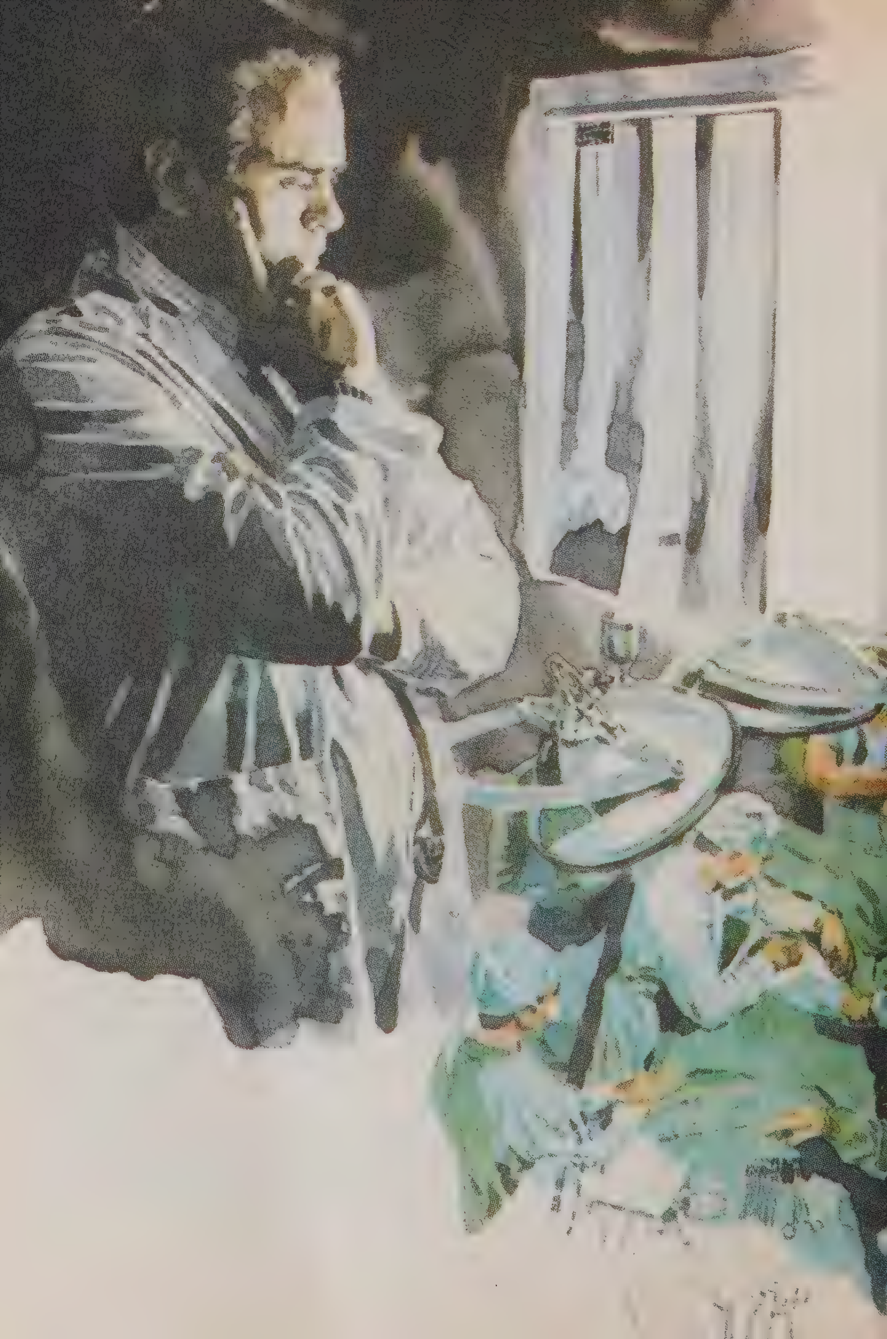


Walter Lord

Today the author's apartment is filled with reminders of the White Star's tragic liner. The walls are hung with paintings of the *Titanic*, a glass case holds a model of the ship as it sinks below the water, and tables are cluttered with memorabilia—silver spoons and porcelain boxes sent to Lord by *Titanic* buffs the world over. In fact, he explains, "Over the years, people have sent me so much information about the accident that it seemed to call for a second book." An added incentive was the recent discovery of the ship itself. There is controversy over whether it should be salvaged or left as a monument. "At first I was against touching anything," Lord comments, "but now I feel that if the major parts are left alone, just to pick up a doll or a bottle of wine lying on the ocean floor might help people to remember."

As for his next project, Walter Lord is not saying. But he recently visited the navy archives in Washington, D.C. It's a good bet he may soon be back at sea!

PHOTO COLIN DAWKINS



Two young patients.
One caring doctor.
More than just lives were at stake.

The Choice

A condensation of the novel by

Henry Denker

Illustrated by Ted Lewin

A tennis star at fifteen, Amy Bedford has dreams for the future that are sky-high. On the courts she has confronted many challengers and overcome them. But now she faces a terrifying new adversary—bone cancer—and she is forced to make the most important choice of her life.

Her sympathetic surgeon, Walter Duncan, guides Amy in her decision. A father himself, "Dr. Walt" has dreams for his own young daughter. But these may be shattered when he too must make a heartrending choice.

A moving story of inspiring courage, unbearable loss and the ultimate power of love.

Chapter One

IN SURGERY 3, on the fifth floor of University Medical Center, Dr. Walter Duncan was experiencing more difficulty than usual implanting the titanium prosthesis that had been designed for the sixty-eight-year-old patient. Restraining his frustration, working diligently and with great strength, Duncan finally succeeded. Once he had tested the appliance—a hip piece—and was assured it would respond easily, he began to close the incision.

He glanced up at the wall clock. Already past five. He knew now that the problem he had encountered with this patient had made it impossible for him to appear at Simone's school for her very first performance in her class play. Emily would be there, of course. But for Simone that was no special treat; her mother was always there. But Daddy . . .

Walt Duncan could already visualize the look on Simone's face when he came upstairs to kiss her good night. She would insist that she understood why Daddy couldn't be there. But the look in her moist eyes would belie her acceptance.

Having closed the incision and carefully packed and splinted the hip to immobilize it, Walter Duncan removed his mask, ripped off his thin surgical gloves and tossed them into the refuse can. He hurried out of surgery and heard himself being paged.

He picked up a wall phone, announcing briskly, "Duncan!"

"Walt?" A familiar voice greeted him softly. It was the voice of his scholarly mentor and longtime friend, Dr. Simon Rosen.

"Yes, Sy."

"Look, I know you're busy. So tell you what—I took a liberty. I hope you don't mind. When you get to your car in the parking lot, you will find a file. Take it home. We'll talk in the morning. Okay?"

"Of course, Sy."

"Good. Now get going. Maybe you can make it before Simone's play is over. And give her a kiss for me."

"How did you know about—" Walt started to say.

"My godchild is in her first big role in a school play and I'm not supposed to know about it?" Sy Rosen demanded. Then he urged, "Now get over to that school, Walt!"

On his way to the school Walt realized that Emily must have called Sy, urging him to get her husband out early on this special afternoon. As he drove, Walt thought back to the day he had first met Sy Rosen. Having completed medical school and two years of internship, Walt had applied for a place as resident on the orthopedic service at the hospital.

Ever since Walt was a boy, he had known that he was destined to study medicine. But his devotion to the specialty of orthopedics was the result of his experience in Vietnam, where as a lieutenant he had often stood alongside his wounded men when they were being treated at a forward medical unit. He had marveled at military surgeons who possessed the skill to mend broken, torn and shattered limbs. To be able to make mangled young bodies whole again had become, to Walter Duncan, a physician's finest work. On his return to civilian life he entered medical school and soon learned that if orthopedics was to become his specialty, there was only one hospital and one man he could aspire to serve: University Medical Center and Dr. Simon Rosen.

During that first interview Walter Duncan was a very surprised young man. Most surgeons as famous as Rosen had reputations for being busy, brusque men. But Rosen was soft-spoken, taking the time to acquaint Walt with the rigorous life of a surgeon on his orthopedic service. Clearly, he was not the kind to demand total dedication—he expected it without demanding. He also expected a substantial measure of volunteer work.

Walter Duncan would discover later that Sy Rosen had no close family and never had married. Many times Walter thought if Sy had had a wife and children, they would have felt grievously neglected.

Regardless of his own personal life, Rosen was always solicitous of Walt's obligation to his family. On the day Walt's daughter was born and became his namesake, Sy Rosen had sent gifts to her and to Emily. And he had never failed to do so on Simone's eleven birthdays and Christmases since.

Sy Rosen was now past his own days of active practice and had been honored with the title of professor emeritus. He was, in fact, considered the prime consultant for all difficult orthopedic cases in the entire Midwest. Many times his fingers itched to operate on patients he had to pass on to younger men. The toughest cases he referred to Walter Duncan. He looked upon Walt not only as a protégé and successor but as the son he'd never had.

WHEN Walt finally arrived at his daughter's school, the empty parking lot told him all he needed to know. He turned his car homeward. He debated stopping to pick up a gift for Simone. But he had become aware that such diverting little bribes were not nearly as effective as they had been when Simone was younger.

By the time he arrived home, Simone had already had an early dinner and gone up to bed. It would have done no good to explain to his wife why he was late. She'd heard the excuses before. Besides, her beautiful face, her pale blue eyes, her silence were a more telling rebuke than any words she might have said in return.

He asked only, "How was she?"

"Wonderful. She was so into her part that for the first few minutes I didn't even know it was her."

"Is she still awake?"

"Unless she fell asleep crying," Emily said softly.

That was all the spoken rebuke there was. He climbed the stairs, making himself all kinds of promises. A long vacation, the three of them together, when school was out for Easter. Summer at the latest. Scheduling his surgeries even earlier in the morning so he could be home for dinner more often.

He was full of righteous resolutions by the time he arrived at Simone's door. When he knocked, there was no answer. He opened the door gently.

The room was dark except for the slant of light from the hallway that fell across her bed. Little Simone was lying on her side, her blanket drawn tight around her. He knew she was not asleep, not in so tense a posture. He approached her bed and knelt down beside it. He whispered, "Baby?"

She clenched her eyes tightly. He kissed her on the cheek. She opened her eyes. Emily was right. She had been crying.

"Baby, I'm sorry." She did not react. "Mom tells me you were terrific. I wish I'd been there to see. Tomorrow at breakfast you must act out your whole part for me. Okay?"

She did not reply. He kissed her again, then buried his face in the soft, warm crook of her neck. Finally her hand stole out from under the blanket to embrace his hand.

"Next time?" she bargained. "Promise?"

"Next time, baby," he said.

She kissed him. "You need a shave, Daddy," she said. She turned on her other side and drifted off to sleep.

After dinner, in the den with Emily, Walt skimmed the case history Sy Rosen had given him. He held up the X rays to his desk lamp. He studied the results of the scans. He was puzzled that Sy had asked him to get involved. It was not a case in which he would have recommended surgery. Yet the surgery had already been performed. And to judge from the file, it had not been performed well. It was too late to correct anything now.

Why, then, had Sy given him this file to review? And why had the names of both patient and surgeon been removed?

He would ask Sy in the morning. By the time he looked up to pay some attention to Emily, he discovered that she had gone to bed. If he neglected his daughter, he was even more neglectful of his wife. Always on the assumption that she understood the demands of his career.

Walter Duncan had first laid eyes on Emily Ingraham as she was entering the library at University Medical Center. It was just after he had begun to serve his residency. She was a petite, attractive young woman and seemed extremely serious. A nurse, possibly, or a med student, he thought. She possessed a face of small but perfectly matched features. With her dark hair and her black-framed spectacles she appeared to be sober, dedicated, intent on a mission.

He stood alongside her at the librarian's desk and heard her ask for an outdated medical textbook. His curiosity stirred, he volunteered, "If you're looking for information on the proper treatment of tuberculosis, I can suggest a much better book: *Miller on Thoracic Disease.*"

She had turned to look up at him, a hulking six feet three inches tall, with shaggy hair. She noticed that he had a strong face and a jutting jaw, but his brown eyes softened the total impression. Her first glance reflected resentment at his intrusion. Then she smiled, her face turning from merely pretty to warm and inviting.

"If you want the latest and best," he added, "ask for Miller."

"Well, if I ever do want the latest and best, I will," she said, turning back to the librarian to renew her request.

Walt Duncan watched her start off toward the stacks to which the librarian had directed her. He could not resist. He followed and reached her just as she was straining to take down from a high shelf the book she wanted.

She succeeded, but as she turned away she collided with him. They both apologized. Then he proceeded to lecture her. "Young woman, if you are interested in the treatment of tuberculosis, you will get nothing but a lot of misinformation out of that volume. The treatment of tuberculosis has changed radically since that time." He took the volume out of her hands.

"Now, just one minute—" she started to protest.

"Look, tell you what I'll do. I will personally introduce you to the chief of thoracic medicine here. He will tell you everything you want to know. But this book is a waste of time."

"I want that book," she insisted.

"I have noticed one thing about women, particularly young women. They are most stubborn when they are most wrong," he said, replacing the volume on the high shelf with ease.

"Is that your specialty, Doctor? Studying women?" She started to reach for the textbook again, standing on tiptoe.

"My specialty is going to be orthopedics, but I can tell you now that straining to reach that way is not doing your lower back any good." He took down the volume but did not hand it to her.

"I have noticed one thing about doctors, particularly young doctors. They are most stubborn when they are most wrong," she mimicked.

"What does that mean, Miss . . ."

"Ingraham," she informed him. "Now, Doctor, if you were less intent on *telling* me and more on finding out what I want to discover, we might get on a good deal better!"

"You want to learn the best treatment for tuberculosis," he declared.

"In 1927," she added.

"In 1927? Why would anybody—"

"Because, my dear young doctor, I am in the process of editing a novel that takes place in the 1920s, and I want to check some of the author's facts."

"Is that what you do, edit novels?" he asked, intrigued.

"With a B.A. in English lit what better could I do?" she asked, taking the book from him and starting toward a reading table.

He followed her. "Miss Ingraham, do you also happen to have a first name?"

"Most people do. Emily."

"Emily Ingraham. I like the sound of that. Tell me, do you ever edit novels about orthopedic surgeons?"

"Not so far," she said.

"Too bad. I could be a great help there."

"Well, if I ever do, I'll call on you, Dr. . . ."

"Duncan."

"Okay, Dr. Duncan." She continued toward the table.

Disappointed, he called, "Don't you even want to know my first name?"

She pretended to consider her reply, then said, "I suppose, whether I want to or not, I'm about to learn it."

"You sure are. Walter," he declared.

"Walter Duncan, orthopedic surgeon. I like the sound of that," she said, smiling impishly.

A bit sheepishly he admitted, "I'm not really an orthopedic surgeon yet. Not board certified, that is. I'm in training under Dr. Rosen. Simon Rosen."

"The way you say it, it seems I should be familiar with his name," she said.

"Yes. Because he's the best there is. If you'd like to meet him, I can arrange it."

"Can you?" she asked, pretending to be interested.

"He runs a Wednesday-night seminar at his home. For a small group of selected residents. We talk about developments in orthopedics. Then there's coffee and cake and usually some gossip about hospital politics."

"Does he permit outsiders?"

"Well, for someone as pretty as you, I'm sure Sy would make an exception. Are you free Wednesday evening?" he asked.

"If I can finish editing this novel, I will be."

"I'll pick you up. Say, around seven?"

"Seven," she agreed, and wrote out her address for him.

After that first Wednesday evening Emily Ingraham became a regular at Sy Rosen's seminars. By the time she and Walter married, Sy Rosen was close enough to both of them to serve as Walter's best man.

"I WENT over that file, Sy," Walt Duncan reported as he seated himself across the desk from the elderly consultant.

"And?" Sy asked, tugging gently on the narrow fringe of white beard that bordered his ruddy face. "Anything trouble you?"

"The dates."

"For instance?" Sy asked.

"The first examination of the boy, the initial X rays and the EMG all in a space of three days. Then four days later, surgery. Too fast. Much too fast."

"Yes, it seemed a little hasty to me too," Sy agreed.

"I should think the surgeon would have tried to avoid operating. At least until more conservative measures had failed to relieve the patient's pain. It seems to have been nothing more serious than sciatic pain down to the left foot accompanied by some muscle weakness. Both of which might have responded to rest, medication and other noninvasive treatment. But surgery—"

Walt shook his head. "Sy, I'd hate to tell you what I suspect."

"Me too. Smacks a little of greed, doesn't it, Walt?"

"Surgery performed for the doctor's benefit, not the patient's," Walt said. "And the surgery was botched. Unfortunately, it's beyond repair. I wouldn't know how to cure the dropped foot that has resulted."

"He'll never control that foot again," Sy agreed. "He's only eighteen, and he'll have to wear a brace the rest of his life."

"Sorry, Sy," Walt said, handing back the file.

Sy did not reach for it. "Keep it, Walt. Study it further. Because we have a decision to make."

"Decision? There's nothing we can do to repair the damage."

"This file was sent to me by the young man's attorney. There is a very large malpractice suit involved here."

"They want expert testimony; is that it?"

"That's why it was sent to me," Sy informed him. "But that old buzzard Worthington, in cardiology, tells me that my heart is no longer up to the strain of testifying."

Walt was aware of the purpose of Sy's statement. They both possessed the same righteous anger toward surgeons who practiced their profession as if it were a trade. Walt knew he must volunteer to go to court.

"Okay, Sy. So long as it doesn't cut too deeply into my time."

"Don't you want to know who the patient and the doctor are?"

"It doesn't really matter." Then, taking his cue from the grave look on Sy's face, he did ask. "Who was the surgeon?"

"Enright."

"Peter Enright?" Walt asked.

Sy nodded.

"I never did like his work when he was on staff here." Suddenly a thought occurred to Walt. "Say, this didn't happen here, did it?"

"No. At the hospital where he served just before he got here. Frankly, if I'd known about it, he'd never have been accepted. Thank heavens he's gone. Even so, it won't do the reputation of this hospital any good if they hang this on Enright."

"I know. For the rest of his career it will say on his record, 'Formerly of University Medical Center.' That can't be avoided. But there is the patient to consider and the harm done."

Sy nodded once more.

"And we can't let this hospital's reputation become a shield for unnecessary and careless surgery, no matter who was at fault," Walt said. "Okay, Sy, I'll definitely testify."

"Thanks, Walt. Believe me, if I could do it myself, I would. I'm old enough, prestigious enough to take the flak. But, unfortunately, too old for the job. Too old for so many things these days," he said sadly.

WALT Duncan woke, lay there a moment, then became aware that he was in bed alone. Where was Emily? Usually he left her half awake as he kissed her and went on his way to the hospital for early surgery. He turned on his side to look at the clock on the night table. Four minutes to eight. Late indeed! He started to move quickly, then realized, Today is Sunday.

He had promised Emily that this would be a special Sunday. A whole day devoted to Simone. For Emily had warned, "She's going to forget what you look like."

Walt came down to breakfast to find Simone fed and awaiting him. She was dressed for some form of active sport. Tennis, he hoped. He was fairly good at that. All through breakfast he listened to her relate the events of her week. School. The birthday of a friend. An exam on which she had received a B plus.

When he had finished eating, Simone went to the hall closet and brought out the equipment for their game. Two curved sticks. And a hard black rubber ball. So it was to be field hockey, he realized. He had never played the game.

Simone led the way outside. Fortunately, it was a fine, dry, springlike day. The grass made a soft, fragrant cushion on which to fall and roll whenever they made contact. When Simone instructed her father in the strategy of the game, he pretended to be a slow and uncoordinated pupil so that she could become impatient with him and display her superiority.

In one moment of physical contact Simone winced and seemed to catch her breath.

"Did I hurt you, sweetheart?" he asked.

"No, I'm fine, Daddy," the child protested.

"Let me see," he said.

She turned to him. He pulled her shirt out of her shorts and discovered a black-and-blue mark on her side.

"Well, how did you get this? Practicing hockey at school?"

"I guess," she said.

"You'd better be more careful from now on," he said. "Now, shall we take Mommy out to lunch?"

Later, while Simone was changing clothes, Walt said to Emily, "Do you think hockey is too rough a game for girls?"

"I played it and grew up rather well," Emily said. "What makes you ask?"

"Simmie's got a bad bruise on her side. Like someone hit her with a hockey stick at school."

"Nobody hit her with a hockey stick," Emily said.

"How can you be sure?" he asked.

"Because official school practice only starts next week."

Before he could pursue the matter, Simone appeared in the doorway, wearing a pink dress that he favored.

"Ready, Daddy?" she called to him, smiling.

"Ready!" he called back.

On the drive to the restaurant Simone kept up a frivolous chatter, asking him riddles and playing word games with him. But all the while Walt kept thinking, Watch that bruise on her side. For some undefinable reason it troubled him.

IT WAS four o'clock in the afternoon three days later. Since arriving at the hospital that morning, Walter Duncan had performed surgery on three patients, been called into consultation on four others and had had a chance to eat only half the sandwich Claudia, his secretary, had given him before he made rounds. Clad in a white coat, he was leaving his office when Claudia intercepted him. He was wanted on the phone.

"Later, Claudia!"

"It's Dr. Rosen," she said.

Walter Duncan came back to his desk to take the call.

"Walt," the old man said. "In this modern age things happen faster than they used to. We've already got some flak."

"Flak?" Walt asked, puzzled.

"Russell" was all Sy said, and all he needed to say. James Rowe

Russell was the only trustee who had inherited his place on the board of trustees. His father had been the prime mover in building University Medical Center, having been its most generous donor. Thus the current Russell looked upon the institution as virtually his own possession.

"What does Russell want this time?" Walt asked.

"He's heard about the case against Enright."

"How?"

"Enright's lawyer figured if he could involve Russell, he'd bring pressure on any doctor who was considering testifying."

"So?"

"Russell would like to talk to you," Sy warned.

"Okay," Walt said. "I'll call him."

"Right away," Sy suggested. "Give him time to brood about it and he'll be five times as angry by morning."

AT THE same time that Walt Duncan had Claudia place his call to James Russell, tennis practice was under way at Midvale High School under the watchful eye of Lars Olafsen, whom everyone called Swede. Swede had been physical education instructor and tennis coach at Midvale High for more than a generation. His hair, which had been the color of standing wheat when he started, was now white as snow. But his blue eyes were as sharp as ever when he paced behind the courts watching his pupils practice.

His boys' teams of the past had earned their share of citywide and statewide honors. This year his team again promised to go all the way to the state finals and was even a fair bet to win the championship. However, unlike previous years, this time his players had a shot at the girls' title too.

His ambitions for a double title rested mainly on the excellent strokes, good eye and graceful style of fifteen-year-old Amy Bedford. Deceptively slender for a girl who hit so powerfully, Amy reminded old Swede of some of the greats he had seen when he was young. She could not only win the state championship, he thought, but she might go on from there.

This afternoon Amy seemed to be having an off day. Swede noticed that when she came off her right foot after shifting her body weight, she betrayed a slight hitch.

When she came to the side of the court to towel her wet and pretty face, Swede suggested, "Enough for today, Amy."

"Why?" she asked, almost resentful.

"You're losing your smoothness, your ease of stroke."

"I'm trying to work it out," Amy said.

"Work what out?" Swede asked, taken by surprise.

"I've got a slight pain in my right leg," Amy admitted. "But I'll work it out before the tournament. So don't worry, Swede."

"Okay, Slugger," Swede said, smiling and resorting to her pet name. "Just don't push it too hard."

Later that afternoon, after his charges had deserted the courts, showered, dressed and were leaving the school, Swede Olafsen watched as Amy Bedford strode down the corridor toward the open doors, her trim figure silhouetted against the afternoon sunshine. She walked with a slight hitch too.

He must watch her closely for the next few days.

JAMES Rowe Russell, a man in his late fifties, was generally described in the media as a wealthy philanthropist. But his main activity was running the medical center.

At this moment Walt Duncan was facing him, considering how to respond to Russell's question: "If you're so sure of your opinion about this lawsuit, wouldn't *most* surgeons feel the same way?"

"Most honest surgeons, yes," Walt granted.

"Then it shouldn't be hard to find other experts who would testify on behalf of this patient," Russell said. "Why must it be a doctor on staff at our particular hospital?"

"The file was originally sent to Dr. Rosen. Why, is quite obvious. What orthopedist in this part of the country has a better reputation? When, for reasons of health, Sy was advised not to appear, he turned the matter over to me."

"And, of course, you couldn't refuse. You never refuse him anything, do you?" Russell asked.

"We generally agree" was all that Walt replied.

Russell's face became ruddy as his anger simmered. "Let me put the matter directly, Duncan. It would do this institution great harm if you were to testify against a man who had once been on staff here."

"It would do this institution even greater harm if it became known that we concealed the truth out of a mistaken sense of loyalty to a former staff member whose standards are less than professional."

"It is not this hospital's job to take part in lawsuits," Russell protested. "Particularly lawsuits in which we are not involved. This happened at another hospital and to a man who is no longer our responsibility."

"Mr. Russell, I believe that anytime the practice of medicine is less than it should be, it becomes the responsibility of every physician to point that out!"

Walt rose from his chair to pace as he continued. "I know what you're thinking, Mr. Russell. And I don't blame you. A big verdict against any hospital raises the cost of insurance for all hospitals. And the malpractice insurance for this hospital already runs into the hundreds of thousands."

"More than a million!" Russell corrected.

"Over a million, then," Walt conceded. "And why? Because for years the profession tried to sweep its failures under the rug by virtually blacklisting any doctor who dared testify on behalf of an unfortunate and damaged patient. And now, giving vent to their outrage, juries have been handing down large multimillion-dollar verdicts. Well, the answer isn't to go back to the old ways, but to practice a standard of medicine higher than before."

Both men knew that the last word in this particular encounter had been spoken.

LATER that afternoon, on his way home from the hospital, Walter Duncan stopped by the law office of Andrew Silverstein to confer with him for the first time about his testimony in the case. A small, dapper man, Silverstein seemed well prepared for Walt's visit and displayed a level of expertise in the surgical problem involved that would have done credit to any physician.

Home again, late again, Walt reproached himself as he pulled his car into the driveway. No one answered his cheery call from the front door.

He went to the kitchen. Neither Simone nor Emily was there. He went to the foot of the stairs. "Hi! Anybody up there?"

"Daddy?" came Simone's voice. It seemed tense.

He bounded up the carpeted stairs, reached the door of her room and discovered Emily sitting on the bed, alongside Simone, who lay on her stomach.

"What's wrong?" he demanded as he drew close to the bed.

"She has another black-and-blue bruise. On her arm this time," Emily said, pointing to an irregular blemish on the inner side of her daughter's left arm.

"How in the world could she get hit with a hockey stick there?" he asked, leaning over to examine the spot. He flexed Simone's arm, which moved easily, then pressed the bruise. He finally concluded, "Playing hockey with your friends again before school practice starts? Let's stop for a while."

"But Dad—"

"There are other forms of exercise at least as good and not so dangerous." Before the child could continue the argument, he kissed her and said, "Your father was a tennis player in college, and it didn't do him any harm. Did it?" He smiled.

She finally smiled. "No, Dad, it didn't."

"Tell you what. If you want to take tennis lessons, I'll ask Swede Olafsen at the school to make you his special pupil. Private lessons. With a new racket. Okay?"

"Okay," Simone finally conceded.

EMILY sat across from him as he ate his late dinner.

"How did it go today?" she asked.

"The usual," he said.

"I mean that session with the lawyer."

"Oh, that. Pretty well. Why?"

"I ran into Millie Enright today. She ignored me."

"Sorry," Walt said. "But it can't be helped."

"Walt, are you sure her husband handled the case that badly?"

"It's plain from the patient's history. There was no need for immediate surgery, if at all. And the condition the patient was left in proves the surgery was done badly."

"I don't understand. If Enright is so inept, how come he was accepted on staff at the medical center?" Emily asked.

"And was asked to leave very soon thereafter, don't forget."

"Still, there must have been some reason for accepting him in the first place," Emily insisted.

"Frankly, that troubled me too. Before going to see Silverstein, I looked up Enright's file. With the recommendations he had, any hospital in the country would have grabbed him. So I called Dick Forester. Enright was on Dick's orthopedic service before he came to us. And Dick didn't have much good to say about him."

"But you said they gave him such a great recommendation when he left," Emily argued.

"Of course. Dick admitted he had to do it. His trustees insisted, to avoid being sued by Enright if Dick wrote the letter of condemnation he was itching to write. That's what hospitals do in these litigious times. Send off their failures with praise and a sigh of relief, saying, 'Let him become some other hospital's problem.' "

His appetite failed, Walt pushed back his plate and stood up.

"I made some chocolate mousse," Emily said.

"No thanks, hon. I've got too much reading to do."

He kissed her, and before starting for the den, he said, "Keep an eye on Simone. I don't like those bruises."

Chapter Two

SWEDE Olafsen was watching his charges work out when he noticed that Amy Bedford, who had been about to serve, suddenly turned away from the baseline and hurried to the fence. Her young body seemed to convulse. Swede ran toward her and was still some paces away when he realized the girl was vomiting.

"Amy! What is it, Amy?" he called out.

She didn't answer, embarrassed, and began to weep.

"Easy now, Amy. Easy does it," he whispered when he reached her. "Come with me." He shepherded her toward the door to the gym.

She was seated in his office, looking guilty, as he asked, "What did you have for lunch?"

"I—I didn't have any," she said.

"What was it, then, nerves?" the coach asked. "You don't have any cause for nerves, Amy. I've never seen a girl better prepared for the state finals."

"I—I think it was the aspirin," Amy admitted.

"Aspirin. Why aspirin?" Swede asked.

"The pain in my leg. It wouldn't go away. So I started to take aspirin. I took six tablets this morning," she confessed.

"That would be it," Swede observed grimly. "Get up, Amy. Let me see you walk away from me."

The girl complied. He watched as she walked toward the door of his long, narrow office. There was no question. She still manifested that limp.

"Still hurts, doesn't it?" the coach asked.

"Uh-huh," she said, half looking back at him.

"Worse than before?"

"Yep."

"Come on back," he said. "Now, first thing, no more aspirin. There's no sense trying to hide pain."

"But I want to be ready to play," Amy protested. "I need that title to get into some of the more important tournaments."

"Amy, dear, your health is more important than any title. So let's try a few days of rest. Then we'll see."

After she departed, the coach sat there, staring in her direction. Then, as he often did when confronted by such a problem, he turned to the phone, dialed a number long familiar to him and asked for Sy Rosen.

In moments Rosen was on the phone. "Hi, Swede. What's up?"

"Sy, I've got a girl on my squad. Amy Bedford. She's having a little pain."

"Pain? Where?" Sy asked.

"Right leg. You see—"

"Where in her right leg?" Sy interrupted.

"Seems to be just below the knee. In the front. It must be bad, because she's been overdosing with aspirin."

"Swede, send her in. I'll have her x-rayed. Probably nothing. But let's make sure."

"Thanks, Sy. She's my best. With a good chance of going pro."

"X RAY? Why, darling?" Marion Bedford said when Amy told her. "For a slight pain in the leg? Let me see."

She knelt beside her daughter and ran her fingers up and down the area just below Amy's knee. "There's no swelling," Mrs. Bedford concluded. "I'd better call Dr. Corey before we do anything. What did you say that doctor's name was, the one Swede mentioned?"

"Dr. Rosen. Simon Rosen," Amy said.

Mrs. Bedford placed her call to Amy's pediatrician and was put on hold for some minutes. During that time she nervously brushed back the strands of her long blond hair. Though she had attempted to minimize the problem, instinctively she feared there was something terribly wrong. Her concern anticipated her husband's attitude, which he most often expressed with considerable impatience. "Darn it, Marion, I work all day and part of the night. It's your job to run the house and take care of our daughter. I hope that's not too much to expect."

Thus Ed Bedford rid himself of all responsibility for the care of his daughter, whom he loved but whom he felt unequipped to deal with. A workaholic, he was much more at ease at the large machine-tool business he owned.

When Charles Corey came on the line, Marion Bedford explained the situation. He asked only one question. "Whom did Swede recommend?"

"A doctor at University Medical Center named Rosen."

"Sy Rosen?" Corey asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"She couldn't be in better hands. Just tell Rosen to call me when he gets the results."

"RELAX, Amy," Rosen said. "It *is* Amy, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," the girl said, playing nervously with her fingers, which rested in her lap.

To put the girl at ease, Rosen said, "It seems you and I have some things in common, Amy. We both have the same tennis coach. Or had. I don't play much anymore. But when I did, Swede was my coach. Well now, he tells me you are having a little pain in the leg."

"Yes, sir," Amy responded.

"Just where?" Rosen asked, leaning forward in his chair.

Amy drew a circular line below the knee of her right leg.

"Aha," Rosen said. "Get up, child. Walk to the door and back."

Amy followed his instructions. When she was seated again, the elderly surgeon knelt beside her and palpated the area of pain. There was no swelling, but his sensitive fingers detected a very slight difference in surface temperature between that area and the lower part of her leg.

"Well," he said, pretending to be casual, "let's have a go at that X ray. Mrs. Kruzsik, my nurse, will take you down there. And afterward I'll call Dr. Corey and tell him what I find."

Sy Rosen watched as the girl walked out of his office. Damn it! he thought. Why do I always have to look at the dark side? It could be nothing.

Yet, years of instinctive hunches warned him otherwise.

WHEN Walter Duncan opened the door, he found the consultation room dark. Sy sat in a corner. Even in the darkness Walt could tell the old man was deeply concerned.

"Sy?" Walt asked. "You wanted me to look at a set of X rays?"

"They're mounted on the viewing screen. Take a look."

Walt approached the wall of opaque glass, snapped on the back light and studied the two X-ray films of the long leg bones of a patient. It took no longer than a few moments. He turned to Sy.

"X rays like this aren't definitive. Still . . ."

"Still *what?*" Sy asked.

"I can't fool you. Biopsy. That's the only way to be absolutely sure. Who's the patient?"

"A fifteen-year-old girl named Amy Bedford."

"Say, isn't she the young tennis player I've read about? One of Swede's protégés?"

"That's the girl."

"Good Lord!" was all Walt could say. Then he asked solemnly, "Whom do we talk to?"

"Chuck Corey's her pediatrician," Sy said. "I'll call him so he can inform the family. Will you take on the case?"

"Of course," Walt said, knowing that of all cases the ones involving young people were to him the most taxing emotionally. Especially since Simone had been born, each time he treated a child, it was as if he or she were his own.

IT WAS EARLY EVENING BEFORE Dr. Corey, a busy pediatrician, could return Sy's call. The conversation was brief.

"Chuck, I'm arranging for Walt Duncan to take over Amy Bedford's case. Meantime, would you arrange for her to have another X ray right away?"

"Another X ray?" Corey asked, puzzled.

"Her chest this time."

At the word "chest," Corey's quick mind came directly to the point. "What do you suspect, Sy? Metastases to the lungs from osteogenic sarcoma?"

Sy could hear the grimness in Corey's voice. "We only suspect, Chuck. We don't know for sure."

"I'll get her in for chest X rays first thing tomorrow," Corey said. "What next?"

"Biopsy. If it confirms what we suspect, then we'll do bone and CAT scans. If it is a sarcoma, it may not be primary. We have to make sure it isn't a metastasis from another part of her body. About her family; how do we handle that?"

"Her mother is a good, strong woman. Has to be. Because her father is a high-strung workaholic who'd have you believe he's all business. But from my experience I think he does it to cover up. The man can't handle personal problems. So I won't guarantee how he'll react. When the time comes—" Corey corrected himself. "*If* the time comes, I suggest we hold a joint consultation. You and Walt to answer the technical questions, of which Bedford will have plenty. And me to reassure them. But first I'll get those chest X rays and explain the need for the biopsy."

SY ROSEN and Walt Duncan were in the darkened room staring at a wall-long viewing screen on which were displayed Amy Bedford's X rays. As they moved from one film to another, the only encouraging aspect was that the chest films Corey had sent over showed that the girl's lungs were clean.

"Schedule that biopsy as soon as possible, Walt."

Walt studied the films as he observed, "Blind needle biopsy won't do. Not in a case like this."

Sy agreed. "Open incisional biopsy is the way. Especially in this case."

When Walt Duncan arrived home, Simone was upstairs, getting ready for bed. He went up quietly, hoping to catch her unawares and make a game of his late homecoming. He found her in her bathroom, standing before the full-length mirror in her nightgown, feeling another contusion, this time on her shoulder. Damn, he thought, I said she was to give up hockey.

He surprised her when he said, "I hope you hit back this time."

Simone turned to her father. "I think I banged into the door of my locker," she said. "But I can't remember."

He held out his arms to her, and she came to him. He kissed her good night, at the same time examining that bluish spot on her shoulder. He pressed it. She did not react in pain. He looked into her face.

"Something wrong, Daddy?" she asked.

"No. Nothing. Just get into bed. It's late."

With no word of protest the child obediently went to her room and climbed into bed. He lingered only long enough to kiss her again. Then he went down to the den, where Emily had his predinner drink waiting.

"Did you know Simone had another one of those things on her shoulder?" he asked.

"No," Emily said. "She gave up hockey, you know."

"Did she make much of a fuss about it?"

"No. Which surprised me," Emily admitted. "I thought she'd be her usual rebellious self. But maybe she's maturing faster than we think."

"Maybe," Walt said. "Does she look the same to you?"

"Of course," Emily said. "Why shouldn't she?"

"Isn't she pale?"

"Light-skinned brunettes always seem pale," Emily said. "They used to say that about me when I was a kid. Now bring your drink to the table. Dinner's ready."

"Okay," he said, preoccupied.

Sy Rosen did not wish to alarm the Bedfords unnecessarily before all the medical evidence was in. Especially since he had been warned of the volatile nature of Amy's father. So her biopsy the next week was treated as a routine bit of minor surgery. But five days later, when the pathology report reached Sy's desk, it affirmed that patient Amy Bedford, fifteen years old, was the victim of a full-blown case of aggressive osteogenic sarcoma.

When Walter Duncan read that report, he scheduled the bone scans and CAT scan without delay.

It took several phone calls and one meeting postponed at the last minute before Ed Bedford, his wife, Marion, and their daughter, Amy, could be assembled in Sy Rosen's consultation room along with Walter Duncan and Chuck Corey.

Warned of Bedford's proclivity for wanting technical answers, Sy relied on the X rays and bone scans to make the first explanation. "You see here, Mr. Bedford, on this X ray, this dark shadow?"

"Yes," Bedford said impatiently. "What is it?"

"Evidence of a neoplasm. An unnatural growth."

"Unnatural," Bedford repeated. "Which means what?"

"A tumor," Sy explained. "A tumor of the bone. Now, on these bone scans you can see this hot spot—"

"Hot spot!" Suddenly Bedford stood up and interrupted. "Are you telling me that that thing in my daughter's leg is a cancer? Impossible! Fifteen-year-old kids do not get cancer!"

"Ed, please!" Marion Bedford said. Though she was on the verge of tears, she tried to comfort her daughter by reaching for her hand.

"Look," Bedford exploded, "I'm no dummy! Just tell me the facts." He turned on Corey. "How could such a thing be there? Lord knows Amy's in your office every year, like clockwork, for a complete physical! How could you miss such a serious thing?"

Walt Duncan rose to his full six feet three and seized Ed Bedford by the shoulders. "Hold on, Bedford!"

Bedford glared up at him. He seemed poised to swing out to break Walt's grip. Instead, he merely continued to stare, appearing to shrink in size, and became far less belligerent.

In a calmer voice Walt continued. "Mr. Bedford, this is an insidious disease. No doctor can suspect it until there are symptoms. And cancer is not solely a disease of the aging. Fifteen-year-olds do get cancer. So forget all your preconceived notions and listen. Very carefully. Because a choice has to be made here today. The most important choice in your daughter's life."

Chastened by those words, a pale, sweaty Ed Bedford sank back into his chair. Walt Duncan stayed on his feet, addressing himself to Amy. He could see how her father's uncontrolled reaction had shaken her.

"Amy, I won't minimize the seriousness of your disease. It is a nasty business. And I won't lie to you. *It can be fatal.* But it can also be treated. In several ways. That's where you and I have to make a choice."

Out of his despair Ed Bedford muttered, "The Kennedy boy . . . They took his leg, amputated it."

With a soft gasp Amy started to weep. Her mother put her arms around her. Walt Duncan quickly dropped to one knee beside the tearful girl. He took her hand.

"Amy, I didn't use that word. Nor did Dr. Rosen or Dr. Corey. I said we have a *choice*. Yes, amputation is one alternative. Maybe the safest one. But there is another way."

As if she had not heard, the slim, blond-haired teenager continued to weep.

"Now, listen to me very carefully, Amy. This is what the other way consists of: For the next six to eight weeks we will put you on a regimen of chemotherapy. If that succeeds and causes the tumor to shrink, I can then perform an operation. Dr. Rosen will be there. Dr. Corey will be there. We'll work as a team. During that operation I am going to remove the part of your calf and thigh bone that is cancerous and in its place insert what we call a prosthesis—a long metal device made of strong, lightweight titanium. If we have to, we can even replace your knee."

"If it works, will I be able to walk?"

"If everything goes well."

"Will I be able to play tennis again?" she dared to ask.

"Not as well as before," Walt replied.

"Then that's my choice," Amy said at once.

"Not so fast, my dear," Walt said. "First, this won't be easy. Second, there are no guarantees. I must be completely honest with you. Those sarcoma cells may have already spread from your leg into your bloodstream. Fortunately, your lungs are clean. They are the area of the body most vulnerable to these cells. So we may have caught this in time. But I want you to know all the risks. We are going to be honest with you all the way, Amy."

Such complete disclosure gave the girl increased confidence in Walter Duncan.

"Now, Amy, if you choose this procedure, you must be willing to undergo a year of chemotherapy, surgery, physical therapy, and all the pain and suffering that goes with it. In a word, if you make this choice, you must be prepared to give us one year of your life. It's a gamble. But if you give us that year, we have a good chance of getting you well."

"A whole year?" she asked.

"A whole year. Forget tennis. Go to school only when you can. Your main job will be to help us get you well and healthy again. What do you say?"

Amy hesitated, then said, "All right. I'll do it."

As if he had gained confidence from his daughter, Ed Bedford nodded too. "Just help my little girl get well," he said.

"We'll do our best," Sy said. "First step, we want Amy to arrange a meeting with our oncologist, Dr. Rita Bristol. She'll explain all about the chemotherapy. I've already called her secretary. She's expecting you."

"Amy," Walt suggested, "why don't you and your mom go down the hall to Dr. Bristol's office?"

Ed Bedford realized it was a request that he remain. Once the door was closed, he reached into his inner coat pocket and took out his checkbook.

"All right, gentlemen. How much money to start with?"

"That's not the reason I wanted you to stay on, Mr. Bedford," Walt said. "Financial matters will be handled in due course. But we want to impress something on you. Your daughter is about to undergo an arduous process. Chemotherapy has some very distressing side effects. She's going to need all the courage she can muster to see it through.

"What she needs from you is not money, but guts. A show of strength, from which she can take strength. If you have to shout in anger or denial, go down to your office. If you have to cry, go into the bathroom and cry. If you have to curse fate because of what's happening to your daughter, do it out of her hearing. What we want from you is a smile. A genuine smile that says, Stick with it, Amy, and we'll all make it. Let her know how much you love her and that you have confidence that she'll beat this thing.

"Above all, don't ever give her the feeling that by getting sick she's let you down. You loved her before; love her more now. She needs it. And always remember, no one was to blame for this. No one could have prevented it. It just happened. That's all."

When Walt was finished, Ed Bedford nodded humbly. After some moments of silence he rose and started for the door. There he stopped and turned to face the three physicians.

"They didn't know. Not Amy. Not her mother. But I've been putting aside bonds for three years now. To finance her first year on the tennis tour. Twenty-five thousand dollars' worth. Now it's all yours, gentlemen."

Irked by the man's crass assumption, Walt Duncan asked, "What if we said it will take ten times that much?"

"It's there. You name it, you got it," Bedford said. "Only do something. Save her!"

THE events of the afternoon had affected Walt Duncan even more than he realized. The face of Amy Bedford followed him as he went on rounds and when he sat in consultations. It was with him so persistently that he finally asked his secretary to call off his last two appointments so he could get home in time to have dinner with Simone and Emily. For he had realized that, different as their vocations might be, Ed Bedford and Walt Duncan had something in common.

IT WAS an enjoyable dinner for all three of them. Simone talked elatedly throughout the meal. More than once Walt had to urge, "Darling, your chicken is getting cold. We'll have plenty of time to talk later." But the child insisted, relating everything that had happened to her in school not only that day but the day before as well. To his dismay, Walter realized her excitement, the sparkle in her eyes, was really a rebuke. She was taking advantage of every moment with him because the opportunity to have him to herself was so rare.

When she left the table, she stopped in the archway. "Come up and kiss me good night later?"

"Of course, sweetheart," Walt said.

As soon as he had finished his coffee he started up the stairs. He found Simmie's door partly open. He peeked in, intending to make a game of it. But she did not respond. He came to her bedside. She was already asleep. She must have been very tired. He bent down to kiss her on the cheek.

When he came down to the den, Emily said, "You came home early tonight."

He smiled. "Come home late, it's taken for granted. Come home early, I have to explain."

"It's not just that. Something happened to you today."

"Yes," he admitted. He told her about Amy Bedford. "I may have overpromised her. But I felt I had to reassure her."

"What *are* her chances?"

"Good," he said, then moderated that to, "Well, not exactly good. There's already an eighty-three percent chance that the cancer could have spread into her bloodstream. But there's a possibility the chemo will counteract that."

"If it doesn't?" she asked.

He hedged, saying, "We'll know soon. Six weeks, eight. The tumor will recede or it won't. That'll dictate what we do next."

"So that's what brought you home early?" Emily remarked. "Simone was beside herself with excitement. She surely made the most of it."

"Wore herself out, it seems," Walt said, smiling. "She been going to bed early recently?"

"Come to think of it, she no longer pouts when I tell her not to watch television. Just goes right up to bed."

Walt settled down to study some lab reports he had received that afternoon. In the morning he would have to get together with Rita Bristol, the oncologist, to establish a treatment plan for Amy Bedford's chemotherapy.

And, he remembered with annoyance, he would soon have to appear in court to testify in the malpractice suit against Peter Enright. He did not look forward to that chore at all.

EVERYONE at University Medical Center considered Rita Bristol a very private person. Aside from her impressive curriculum vitae, which included a record of excellent service with two hospitals in the East, no one at the hospital knew a great deal about her. She was an attractive woman, tiny, dark-haired. She had a reputation for being quite unemotional as well as very open and direct when she prescribed a course of treatment for her patients.

Today, as she faced Amy Bedford and her mother, Dr. Bristol was her usual brisk, efficient self. She wore her black hair in a coronet, which served as an elegant frame for her precise features.

Amy sat as still as she could manage. Her mother sat beside her. Aware of their enormous tension and fear, Dr. Bristol did her best to start the meeting on an optimistic note.

"Amy, I suppose you've heard horror stories of what happens when a person gets chemotherapy. Mostly they tend to be exaggerated. That is not to say that it will be pleasant. Because there will be a war being fought in your body. The good guys are the chemical agents we give you. The bad guys are the cancer cells. And, as in all wars, the innocent sometimes get hurt. So, yes, there will be times of discomfort. Nausea. Vomiting, even, for a time. But none of it as bad as you've heard.

"The main purpose you and I have is to shrink that tumor in your leg. If we can do that, then Dr. Duncan can do his operation. So, every time you feel like quitting, remember our aim. Okay?"

"Okay," Amy murmured, barely audible. Then she asked, "What happens if it doesn't shrink?"

Dr. Bristol was taken by surprise. Unaware of what Walt Duncan might have said, she answered, "In that case there won't be any choice. Dr. Duncan would have to amputate."

A cold hand seemed to grip and twist Amy Bedford's stomach. She turned to her mother. But Dr. Bristol intervened.

"Amy! I didn't say that will happen. I only said if you and I fail, it would happen. So it is most important that we each do our part. Every time you feel like your insides are being torn apart by the chemo, know that you are suffering in a good cause. Discomfort now, stress now, can mean that operation in just weeks. And then a whole new life."

Amy faced Dr. Bristol and took comfort from the look of conviction in her deep, dark eyes.

"Now, Amy, this will be our routine for the next eight weeks.

You will have to have nine doses of a chemical called methotrexate, administered intravenously."

"Will I have to be in the hospital?" Amy asked.

"Only three days at a time. One day to get the treatment. Two days so we can monitor the effects."

"Miss three days of school at a time," Amy said.

"We'll work out something with the school, Amy. Home lessons. A special curriculum. Now, I've arranged a room for you in the pediatric pavilion."

"I'm fifteen!" Amy protested.

Dr. Bristol smiled. "I'm afraid in medical circles we still consider that a proper age for the pediatric service. So, Monday morning. Eight o'clock!"

Chapter Three

On Saturday Amy woke early out of a dream from which she could only remember protesting, "I'm too young, too young." She lay awake, exhausted, her bed damp with sweat.

Vestiges of her dream began to come back to her. She had been protesting to a tall, shadowy person who hovered over her. "I'm too young to have this, too young to be so sick."

She breathed deeply, wiping the sweat from her tense face with the palms of her hands. Monday, she suddenly thought, I will have to report for the first dose of that stuff that Dr. Bristol talked about. Metho something. Which does all kinds of hateful things. What if it's all a waste?

She turned on her side and became aware again of that slight but persistent pain in her leg. To her, the enemy was the pain, not the disease. She had no proof of the disease.

Besides, she told herself, a girl can't be training for the state finals one day and be threatened with death the next.

Before she would submit to the horrors of chemotherapy, she would do a little investigating of her own. She slipped out of bed and went to her closet. She opened the door, which had a full-length mirror. She stood before the mirror and put her right leg forward, turning it first one way, then another. She noticed no swelling. No deformity. She pressed it and pinched it. She felt nothing except for that annoying pain that persisted day and night. But, she thought, after strenuous training for the tournament it was only natural that her leg might hurt.

She had played before despite pain. There was no reason she could not do so again. She determined that she would.

She pondered whether it was too early to call, then decided to risk it. She slipped down the stairs on bare feet. She noticed no light in the kitchen, which meant no one else was up yet. She went into the den, sat at her father's desk and used his phone.

She was prepared with exactly what she would say if Brent Martin's mother answered. Fortunately, it was Brent himself.

"Brent? Amy."

"Oh, hi. Where you been the last few days?"

"You know Swede. I had this pain in my leg, and he wouldn't let me work it out. I guess I'll have to do it on my own. So I wondered, This being Saturday, could you and I rally for an hour or two? Just to get my timing back?"

"If Swede said—"

"Not on the school courts. The public courts. In the park," Amy said. "Please, Brent?"

"For you, Amy, okay. Want me to pick you up?"

Amy considered that for a moment before she said, "No. I'll—I'll meet you there. About nine."

When Amy appeared at the public courts, she looked well dressed in her navy-and-red warm-up suit. The colors contrasted with her blond hair and her eyes. The trim cut hugged her adolescent body in a flattering way.

She waited apprehensively for Brent, afraid he might not show up. But at nine, as promised, he appeared, carrying his racket and a net bag bulging lumpily with used tennis balls. It was evident from the look in his eyes that he liked her.

"Are you sure it's all right?" he asked as they both stripped off their warm-up suits.

"Of course it's okay. I feel great," Amy assured him.

They started warming up from the baselines. He hit long, easy strokes, the sort that Amy liked to return with equal length. Soon they widened the area of play, some of Brent's shots reaching the corners of the court. Amy scampered after the ball, mostly making it in time to strike a good return. Sometimes, though, she could barely get her racket on it. Brent came to the net, ostensibly to put the ball away on a volley. But once there, he tapped his racket on the tape and asked, "Amy?"

"Yeah?" she responded, breathless.

"You're not getting to the ball like you usually do."

"I'm just warming up," she replied tartly, walking toward him.

"You're already warmed up," the young man said. "Something's wrong."

"Nothing's wrong. Just get back there and play."

"Are you sure—" he started to say.

"Brent, you're worse than my mother when it comes to nagging! Now, get back there," Amy insisted.

She started back to the baseline. As she walked away from him Brent noticed the same hitch that had disturbed Swede Olafsen. Brent felt he should make her quit. But he knew how headstrong Amy was. If he didn't practice with her, there wasn't another boy on the team who would refuse. He decided to continue.

"Let's play a few games," she called out.

"Sure," Brent responded. "Serve!"

They played for about twenty minutes, accelerating their pace, increasing their strokes, testing Amy to her limit. But she stayed in the set, determined to show him that she was as good as ever.

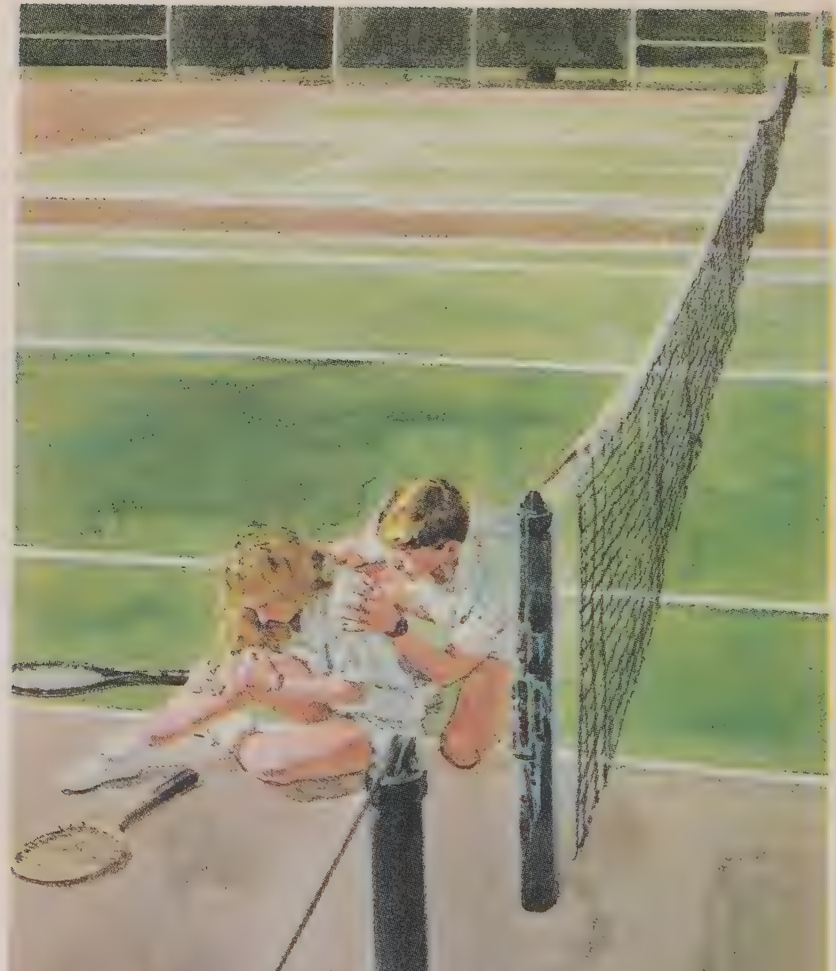
She was at her own baseline, waiting to receive Brent's serve. It was shorter and somewhat softer than she expected. She came in to meet it and sent it back deep to him. She then raced in to reach the net, but her right foot went down under her. She fell forward, sprawling on the green concrete, scraping her knee. The pain was so sudden that despite herself she cried out. Brent raced to the net, vaulting it to reach her.

He knelt beside her, saw the bad scrape and the blood seeping to the surface. Over her protests he lifted her in his arms and carried her to his car.

"Please don't drive me up to my door," she begged.

"I'm not going to let you walk," he said.

As Amy feared, when they pulled up at her house, her mother was waiting at the front door.



"Please, Brent," Amy whispered. "Don't make it any worse by trying to help me to the door."

"Okay," he said. "But tell her the truth."

"We were practicing. Why would I lie about that?"

"I don't know. But I have a feeling it was wrong."

She opened the car door and slipped out. By the time she reached the front door, her mother's face had changed from mere concern to great distress. She assisted Amy into the house and sat her down. She was appalled by the sight of torn skin and blood on the diseased leg. But without a word of recrimination she went to the phone and placed a call to Dr. Corey.

"Call Dr. Duncan" was the pediatrician's advice. "I want him to see Amy at once! Do you understand? At once!"

"WELL, well," Walter Duncan said as lightly as he could manage while he stared at Amy Bedford's right leg.

She looked up at him from the examining table, trying to read his expression. He did not seem as alarmed as her mother had been, or Dr. Corey. In truth, he was more agitated than both of them.

"Just tell me how it happened," Walt said, very tenderly palpating her leg.

She admitted practicing, stressing how good it had felt. Yes, there was still a little pain, but it seemed to lessen as practice progressed. When she described her fall, she insisted it was just one of those accidents that will happen on a tennis court.

"So you see, Doctor, the pain had nothing to do with it."

"Amy, it really doesn't matter how it happened. Whether it was due to tripping on a step or getting out of a car is not important. The only thing that does matter is that you didn't break your leg. Because if you had broken it, we would have had no choice. I would have had to amputate. Today."

She stopped breathing. She could feel her skin tighten. Then she thought, He's only saying that to scare me. But when she looked into his eyes, she knew he was telling her the truth.

"Amy, right now, from what we can determine, those cancer cells are all confined to one area. But should a fracture occur, they'll break out and start rampaging through your body. The only safe course then would be to remove the leg."

Amy began to tremble. Duncan placed his hand on her shoulder and continued. "I only said that would happen if there had been a fracture. So, while you're having chemo, I will have to insist that you wear a leg brace."

"A brace? Like a cripple?" Amy asked.

Walter Duncan corrected, "A brace. Like a young woman with a dangerous condition that we want to cure."

"Would I have to wear it all the time?"

"Yes."

"You mean even those days when I can go to school?"

"Yes."

"Then I won't go! I don't want them to see me like that."

"Amy, I've already called Hans Metterling down in our surgical appliance department. He's there now, even though it's Saturday, and he's waiting to see you."

HANS Metterling's workplace in the basement of the hospital seemed to be a disorderly jumble of metal parts and pieces. There were vises and clamps in which some of those pieces were in various states of preparation. Sketches lined the walls. Metterling gestured Amy to be seated. He did not attend to her at once, but concentrated on filing down a metal part.

Finally he turned to her. "Ah," he said. "*Und* now. Dr. Duncan has told me about you." His accented words seemed a rebuke. "A young girl running around on a tennis court, trying to break her leg. Vell, ve are not going to let that happen."

He peered at her over the high-intensity lenses he wore when he worked. "Say, you really are beautiful, like Dr. Duncan said. Vell, for pretty girls old Hans makes a very pretty leg brace that vill be light as a feather. You like that, young lady?"

Amy tried to nod, but could not.

"I know, I know," he went on. "You are thinking, Vat vill my friends say? A young girl like you, valking around with a leg brace. Vell, two things you can do. You can tell them you don't give a darn what they think. Or else you can wear slacks and they vill never know. Myself, I would wear the slacks. Now . . ."

He gently took her right foot, extended her leg and studied it. Then he began to mumble to himself, making what seemed hieroglyphic notes on an old pad on his worktable. Using a tape and calipers, he measured her leg at various points. It seemed to Amy that he jotted down hundreds of figures.

Finally the old man smiled and stared at her over his glasses, revealing a twinkle in his eyes.

"Ve come for a fitting in four days, no?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Metterling."

"Hans," he corrected. "Hans."

AMY Bedford lay in her hospital bed. Her nervous fingers played with the hem of the sheet that covered her. She stared at her mother, who stood at the foot of the bed trying to smile encouragingly. Amy smiled back. For she felt that if she did not, her mother would soon begin to cry.

"You're going to be fine, fine," her mother kept repeating. "Before you know it, you'll be playing tennis again. Swede told me so."

Amy nodded, though she was thinking, Please, God, make her leave. She doesn't know what to say. She keeps making up things. Swede never said that.

To Amy's relief, Dr. Bristol entered, followed by a nurse who carried a tray of medications and hypodermics.

"Mrs. Bedford, please?" Dr. Bristol dismissed her.

Marion Bedford nodded, trying to smile. "I'll be waiting outside, Amy darling."

The oncologist filled a large hypodermic with a colorless fluid.

"Amy, this is methotrexate. Before we're through, you'll hate that word. But remember all the while, this is the stuff that's fighting those cancer cells."

She tightened a length of thin tan rubber tubing around Amy's biceps until the vein on the inner side of her arm stood out. She washed the area with an alcohol swab to sterilize it. Then slowly she injected the powerful fluid into her.

"There we are. First treatment," Dr. Bristol said. "There'll be nurses available. Just press that buzzer. We know what you'll be going through. Meantime, you can read, listen to the radio, watch television. Now, anything I can do?"

Amy hesitated before saying, "Yes. Please send my mother home." The doctor's noticeable resistance made Amy explain. "I'd like to have her here. But it's too much for her. Too much."

"Amy, let her stay," Dr. Bristol suggested.

"She feels so helpless; she makes up things to say. Trying to give me courage. And it doesn't."

"I can only suggest she go. I can't force her," Dr. Bristol said.

"Then do that, please," Amy pleaded.

In the afternoon, some hours after Amy had received a second injection of methotrexate, she began to feel the first waves of nausea. She reached for the buzzer. But as she pressed it the feeling overcame her. A nurse raced into the room.

"Nurse—Nurse—" Amy began to say, but the words were drowned in another wave of sickness. The nurse held a stainless steel basin to her lips, embracing the girl with her free arm.

"It's all right, Amy," she murmured. "This is par for the course. So don't be afraid."

The first siege was over. Perspiring, Amy lay back in the bed.

"We'll get some clean things and you'll feel better," said the nurse, and she left quickly. Before she returned, Amy heard her door open quietly.

"Amy—" her mother ventured.

"Gee, Mom, not now. I'm a mess."

"I know. The nurse told me. Anything *I* can do?"

The nurse came back. "Out of bed, Amy," she said briskly. The woman quickly stripped the bed and remade it with fresh linen. She then shook out a clean gown. "Out of that one, Amy." She held out the gown, and Amy slipped into it. "Now back into bed."

The nurse placed another pillow behind her head and said, "There. Good as new, aren't we?"

"Until it happens again," Amy said.

"Don't feel embarrassed. You're doing just fine." She turned to Marion Bedford, inviting her to leave. "Mrs. Bedford—"

"No, please," Amy interjected. "I want her to stay now."

"Of course," the nurse said.

The door had closed again. Marion Bedford stood at the foot of Amy's bed. She strained to observe her daughter, to see if she could anticipate the next wave of nausea.

In a while Amy began to feel that evil stirring in her stomach, the burning in her throat. "Mama!" she cried.

Marion Bedford lunged for the steel basin, held it to her daughter's mouth and embraced her quivering young body as the girl retched again.

The spasm gradually passed. She had sweat through her fresh gown. She was breathing hard. But for the present it was over. Her mother turned to set aside the basin.

"Mama?" the girl said softly.

"Yes, dear?"

"Hold me, Mama. Hold me for a little while."

"Of course, baby. Of course."

THERE had been several changes of gowns, but no need to change bed linens again. Between them Amy and her mother had mastered the problem until it became a routine. At times Amy was able to lapse into snatches of sleep.

When Amy woke the last time, it was dark out.

"Is it night? What are you still doing here, Mom?"

"It's not late. And Dad's on his way. He's going to pick me up."

"Oh. Good!"

"You need to have your dinner. Dr. Bristol was by. She said you should eat."

"I don't feel like eating," Amy protested.

"She said try anyhow. I'll buzz for the nurse."

In a short while the nurse placed a tray on the rolling table and raised the bed so Amy was in position to eat.

The girl surveyed the bland food. "Yuck," she said.

The nurse smiled, then said as she left, "Give it a try, Amy. Please?"

Amy tried. The food was tasteless. But she realized why it was all so bland. Any spice at all would start the unhappy process all over again. She ate as much as she could and was still staring at the tray when the door eased open. Her father peeked in.

"Daddy," she said.

He embraced her with his right arm, for in his left arm he held a package. "I had my secretary scour the town for it, darling. Wait till you see." He unwrapped it and produced a small black object, somewhat bigger than a portable radio. "How's that?"

"What is it?" Amy asked.

"Your own private television set. See the size of that small screen? You can watch televison from any position you're in. You don't have to lie on your back and stare up at that set on the wall. And it gets great reception. Here, let me show you!"

He plugged the cord into the wall socket, pressed the on button and waited for the screen to light up. Finally it did. He switched the channels. Unfortunately, no one channel produced an acceptable picture. He was enormously disappointed.

"I'll—I'll take it down to the office. Fritch is great with anything mechanical. He'll figure out what's wrong." Then he changed the subject. "Well, how did it go today, darling? Mom told me you had some rough moments. But you look fine . . . fine."

To ease his discomfort over the gift, Amy said, "It's not as bad as people said it would be. Is it, Mom?"

He noticed the tray. "You didn't eat very much, darling. Hospital food. No wonder. Listen, I'll order some decent food in for you. You name it, you got it."

The phrase was familiar to Amy. She had heard her father use it on the phone many times with customers. Poor Daddy, she thought. Doesn't he know any other way to deal with people?

To relieve him of his promise, Amy said, "It's really good food. Tastes better than it looks. I like it."

At the same time she prayed, Please make him go before I have another attack of nausea. I don't know if he could stand it.

Dr. Bristol came to her rescue as she entered briskly, dressed in street clothes, evidently on her way home.

"Ed, this is Dr. Bristol," Marion Bedford said.

"Howdy, Doctor," Bedford said. "How's our little girl?"

"Based on what I saw and heard today, I'd say she is doing very nicely. She gets her medication when she should. Reacts when she should. Now, if I can suggest, I think she might want to get prepared for a night's sleep. What do you think, Amy?"

"Yes, yes. I'd like that."

Ed Bedford kissed his daughter, gathered up his gift and started for the door. "I'll get this fixed for you, darling," he said.

Marion Bedford kissed her daughter and followed him.

Once they were gone, Dr. Bristol said, "What was that?"

"My own private, personal television set."

"Does it get channels the others don't?"

"No. My father's not good at picking out gifts for girls. His secretary usually does it for him. She must have run out of ideas."

"Well, he tried. That's the important thing," Dr. Bristol said consolingly as she pushed away the rolling table. "You didn't eat much. It's natural not to want food now. But make an effort. Whatever nourishment you can gain is worth it. We need a strong girl for that operation."

She started for the door, but Amy called to her. "Doctor—"

Rita Bristol turned back. "Yes, dear?"

Amy hesitated before asking, "When will we know whether . . . well, whether all this was worth—"

Before Dr. Bristol could answer, the door opened behind her and Walter Duncan entered the room.

"How's our patient doing, Rita?"

"She's on target," the oncologist assured him. "She was about to ask me something you are better qualified to answer. Amy?"

The girl hesitated again, then asked, "When will we know if all this—the chemo, the nausea—was worth it?"

"Six weeks, seven, eight at the most. But don't worry about that now. Just follow the routine Dr. Bristol's laid out—"

Before he could finish, the girl burst out, "If it comes to a time when you have to—to take my leg, let me die!"

"Amy!" he rebuked strongly.

"No. I mean it!" the girl insisted. "I couldn't stand the look in his eyes."

"Whose eyes?" Walt asked.

"My—my father's."

Walt glanced at Rita Bristol, then moved closer to the bed.

"Amy, listen to me. I'm a father too. I have a little girl. Not as old as you. But I know how fathers feel. No matter what happens, he's always going to love you."

"You don't understand," the girl protested. "He has never got used to having a daughter. He wanted a son. He wanted someone to play football. And grow up to go to business school. And take over his business one day."

Walt laughed. "Amy, women do that now. Go to business school. Take over businesses."

"He wanted a son," she insisted. "That's why I took up tennis. To make him proud. It got his attention. Now, if something happens—and you know what that something is—he won't want a daughter, not a one-legged daughter."

"Amy, Amy, come now," Walter Duncan said.

But the girl turned away from him to hide her tears. Walt reached out to draw her to him. He embraced her, held her, and against his better judgment said, "Amy, I gave you my word. One year of your life and I'll cure you."

Chapter Four

SEVEN weeks had gone by. Amy Bedford had appeared at the hospital periodically for her chemotherapy. The treatment had advanced beyond methotrexate. Dr. Bristol had put her on vincristine, a more powerful drug.

Amy had borne up well, enduring all the suffering inherent in the treatment. She attended school on those days she felt able, though both she and her teachers had resigned themselves to the fact that she could no longer keep up with her classmates.

Always, secretly, she counted the days. She marked them off on a calendar that she kept hidden in her desk drawer. In four more days the doctors would take those crucial bone scans and X rays that would reveal whether or not the tumor had shrunk.

Every day she would pose before the mirror, turn her leg this way and that to see if she could determine some change. The most recent scan did not indicate that the tumor had shrunk, but to Amy the leg did look thinner. Perhaps that meant the thing was shrinking. But then, all of her was thinner.

She no longer weighed herself on her mother's bathroom scale. It frightened her. Antinausea drugs had no salutary effect, so she suffered days when she was sure that more came up than she had eaten. With all that, losing weight was inevitable.

She had only one consolation: a few more days and she would know if it all had been worth it.

The night before she was to return to the hospital she stirred in her sleep and woke. After staring up at the ceiling of her room, still sleepy, yet sleepless, she turned on her side. As she turned, her right arm fell easily to the far side of her pillow. Her hand felt something that made her start. She reached across and turned on the light. She saw them—loose strands of her blond hair across the pink pillow. What she had been warned might happen had begun. A gush of tears came to her blue eyes.

After some minutes of weeping she determined to face the worst of it. She threw back her blanket, rose and went to the mirror. It was not as bad as she had feared. Her hair seemed as thick as always. She felt relieved. She was tempted to tug at some of the strands to see if they would come loose in her hand. She decided not to risk it. Instead, she picked up her hairbrush and started to give herself a vigorous brushing.

She continued until the brush suddenly felt strange in her hand. She put it down to flex her fingers. They felt tingly, then numb. She picked up the brush once more, but she lost her grip. It dropped noisily to the dressing table.

Terrified, she ran from the room and burst into her parents' bedroom, crying, "Mom! Mom! I'm paralyzed!"

Startled, Marion and Ed Bedford woke suddenly. Marion bolted from the bed, embraced her sobbing daughter. "Baby, darling, now calm down. And tell me."

"The brush, the hairbrush. I couldn't hold it; it just fell," Amy said through her tears.

"Amy, let me see your hand," her mother said.

Amy held out her right hand.

"Move your fingers."

The girl opened and closed her hand.

"There. See! You are not paralyzed."

"But it tingles, and I can't hold anything."

"I'll call Dr. Duncan!" her father said, jumping out of bed.

"Ed! Ed! Not at this time of night."

"If my daughter is in trouble, I don't care what time it is."

THE phone alongside the Duncans' bed broke the night silence. Walt instinctively turned in its direction and lifted the receiver. "Duncan," he announced.

"Dr. Duncan," Ed Bedford assailed him. "My daughter is in trouble. Big trouble."

"Who is this?"

"Bedford. Ed Bedford."

Walt sat up suddenly. "What kind of trouble is Amy in?"

"Her hands. She can't hold anything—"

"Put her on the phone!" Walt ordered. He waited until he heard Amy sobbing. "Amy, can you hear me?"

"Uh-huh," she managed to say through her tears.

"Just listen to me, dear. And answer yes or no. Do you have any feeling in your fingertips?"

"Uh-huh."

"Is there a tingling?"

"Some."

"Listen closely, Amy. You are having what we call neural toxicity. The drug vincristine that Dr. Bristol had to give you sometimes produces such aftereffects. But it's just a passing phase. Now, you go back to sleep. And don't worry. You won't become paralyzed. The numbness will pass. I promise you."

WALT sat on the edge of the bed. He glanced at the digital clock in the radio: 5:16. Too early to get up, too late to go back to sleep. Besides, he had to leave even earlier than usual this morning. Starting at seven thirty, there were four patients to be operated on. Then a meeting of the Tumor Board to discuss the treatment of a number of cancer patients.

Complicating his life even further, that Enright trial was in progress, and the attorney Silverstein had notified him that he could be called to testify anytime now. And finally, at the end of this day, would be Amy's scans and X rays.

He showered and dressed as quietly as possible. It was still dark out when he stopped by Simone's bedroom to kiss her goodbye. As he bent close to her she opened her sleep-shrouded eyes, said, "Good night, Daddy," and slipped back into sleep.

He kissed her on the forehead and was about to rise when he realized that she was warm. He placed his hand lightly on her forehead. Low fever, he diagnosed. Not alarming in a child. Yet it disturbed him. He must leave a note for Emily.

DR. WALTER DUNCAN PREPARED to study the latest X rays of Amy Bedford. The room was dark. He slipped three sets of matching X rays into the wall-long viewing glass. He flipped on the light. First he studied the set of X rays taken on Amy's initial examination. Then he examined the second set and finally the third set.

He had no need to spend much time on her lung X rays. They were perfectly clear. Encouraging sign. He stared long and hard at the matching films of her leg. Unfortunately, they were too much alike. After two arduous series of chemotherapy treatments there was no clear sign of tumor shrinkage.

His train of thought was interrupted when the door opened suddenly. Dr. Bristol came in, saying, "I heard Amy's new set of X rays are ready."

"They are." Walt pointed to them with no enthusiasm.

The oncologist gave her eyes a moment to adjust to the darkness. Then she compared the films.

"What do you think, Rita? Another series of chemo?"

"It can't do any harm. We might be on the verge of shrinking the darn thing. Be a shame to quit now."

"Can she take it?" Walt asked.

"She's had a bad time with the stomach upsets, but I think she's still game. If you can delay the leg surgery for three more weeks without endangering her life, I'd say let's go for it."

"I'll talk to her," Walt Duncan said.

AMY Bedford and her mother were waiting patiently in Amy's hospital room when Walt came in. The teenager sat up erectly, trying to present an image of health.

He was well aware of her attempt to look good, even though she clearly was not the same patient he had first examined weeks ago. Her pretty face was thinner. Her blond hair still hung freely, but it was much sparser than before; her pink scalp showed through in a few bald spots. Still, she stared up into his eyes, asking, begging for some good word.

"Hi, Amy," Walt said, trying to appear casual. "Dr. Bristol and I just had a go at your X rays. We think we're on the verge . . ."

"Verge" was the only word Amy repeated, but it encompassed all her disappointment, all her shattered hopes.

"We haven't given up, Amy. We'd like to try another series of chemo. Add still another chemical."

"More chemo," Amy said, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Amy," Walt Duncan said, taking her hand, "I know what you've been through. I know—"

"You don't know anything!" the girl exploded in a mixture of anger and tears. "You don't know what it's like to look into the mirror and ask yourself, Is this really me? This isn't my face. I never looked like this before. I get up in the morning and find my hair on the pillow. Lots of it. I'll be bald soon!"

"Amy, please," her mother begged.

But Walt Duncan gestured her mother to silence.

Tears streaming down her face, the girl continued. "I won't go through any more. I can't. I can't face them."

"Can't face *who*, Amy?"

"The others. The guys and girls in school," she confessed. "I can't let them see me this way. I can't." She lost control completely and wept freely. "Just let me die."

"Amy!" her mother said in a hushed whisper.

But Walt's look said, Let her cry. Let her say anything she wants.

Soon the girl was sobbing less and wiping away her tears. Her first words were, "I bet I look even worse now. I'm a wreck."

"You are not a wreck," Walt corrected. "You are a young woman with red eyes, which will look perfectly natural as soon as you get over this crying jag. Now, are you telling me that you won't go back to school? I said you could go. And you *should* go."

"Not the way I look!" the girl said defiantly. She reached to her hair and came away with strands of it in her hand. "There! See!"

"So that's it," Walt said. "Okay. Just wait here!"

When he came back, in his hand was a light green surgeon's cap. He slipped it over Amy's blond hair at a rakish angle and invited her mother's opinion. "How's that?"

"It does have a certain flair," Mrs. Bedford said.

He went to the medicine chest in the bathroom and opened the mirrored door. "Go on, take a look, Amy."

The girl ventured toward the mirror, looked at herself and finally conceded, "It doesn't look too yucky."

"It looks darned good!" Walt Duncan said. While she was staring at herself in the mirror, he continued. "Amy, what do you say? Are you game for another series of chemo? I believe it could do the trick."

She did not reply at once. She was reliving those days and nights in the grip of medication, feeling her guts being torn out.

"Amy," Walt Duncan coaxed, "I believe we can still do it."

Finally she set her jaw and nodded.

"Good!" the surgeon said, then signaled Marion Bedford to join him in the hall outside.

"Mrs. Bedford, I don't want your daughter to become a recluse. I want her back in school. Does she have any special friends who might help?"

"There's one boy. Brent Martin."

"Isn't that the young man she was with when she took that bad fall?" Walt recalled.

"Yes, that's the one."

"Tell him to call me," Walt said.

A few days later, near the end of the afternoon, Walt Duncan pushed open the door to his office to find a tall, blond young man in the waiting room. It was Brent Martin.

"Mrs. Bedford called me," he said. "If it's about that practice session, I tried to discourage Amy from working out. But she was so determined. If you know her, you know she's determined."

"Determined?" Walt said. "Come into my office, Brent."

Once the young man was seated, Walt said, "Amy's overdetermined about some things. And not determined enough about others. She's refused to go back to school."

"Is she allowed to?"

"She's not only allowed to, I want her to. We've got to keep her spirits up. I think you could help."

"Anything you say, Doctor."

"Talk to her. Get her coming back to school. It won't be easy for her. She's very self-conscious about losing her hair and not looking as good as she did. It's your job to tell her that her hair and weight will come back, that she'll be a very pretty girl again. In a word, Brent, you have to be a cheerleader."

The young man nodded soberly. Then he asked, "But how can

I even get to talk to her? Since all this started she's shut herself away from all her friends."

"Some people do," Walt conceded. "They feel cancer is something to be ashamed of. Do you know of any friend of hers who could change her mind?"

"Swede, I think. Swede could do it if anyone can."

"Okay, Brent. Your first assignment, talk to Swede."

He was at the door when Walt suddenly said, "Brent!" The young man turned. Smiling, Walt tossed him a surgeon's cap.

"What do I do with this?"

"Convince Amy to come back to school, and I'll show you."

SWEDE Olafsen arrived at the Bedford home in the early evening. Marion Bedford answered the door. As soon as she recognized Swede her eyes welled up. "She won't see you. She won't see anyone," she warned.

"Tell her that I need her help," Swede said.

Mrs. Bedford hesitated, then asked him in and started up the stairs. Swede waited. Finally Mrs. Bedford came down.

"It's okay. But please don't stare at her. She's losing her hair, and she's very sensitive."

"I've been dealing with youngsters for years, Mrs. Bedford. I know how sensitive teenagers can be."

She led Swede to Amy's bedroom door, and he knocked. After a moment came Amy's soft, hesitant voice. "Come in."

He pushed the door open. In the unlit room he made out her form. She was sitting huddled in a chair in a corner.

"Amy," he began, "I know you're not feeling well. And I wouldn't bother you, except I have a problem. With you out for this season I've got to rely on Carole Wallace."

"Yes," Amy said. "I thought so."

"Well, you can tell a girl she's number one, but that's a long way from making her feel like it."

"What can I do?" Amy asked.

"Carole admires you, always has. If you could tell her how good she is, it would help."

"I'll call her if you want," Amy offered.

"You can't tell her how she's doing unless you watch her."

"That would mean I . . ."

"That's right, Amy. You would have to come back to school."

"Back to school. I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because . . ." The girl seemed to draw back into the darkness even more.

"If I didn't need your help, I wouldn't ask," Swede said. "You know what a state title means to the school. And I've been thinking about retiring. I sure would like that trophy in the school gym before I leave."

"I'll think it over" was all she would say. Then, as the tall, white-haired coach turned to leave, Amy called to him. "Swede—"

"Yes, Amy?"

"I know what it means to you. So, okay, I'll do it."

BRENT Martin waited down the block from the Bedford house. He had been waiting since a quarter to seven in the morning. Finally he saw the front door open. Amy and her mother came out. For an uneasy moment it seemed that Amy might change her mind and go back in. But then she started down the walk.

As he overtook her he slowed down, trying to make his discovery appear accidental. "Hi! Amy? That you?"

She half turned to face him. He was pleased with the way she looked, with the way she wore that surgeon's cap. It sat perched on her head at a jaunty angle, fixed in place with bobby pins. She was thinner, but she was almost as pretty as ever.

"Hey, you look great, Amy!" Brent said enthusiastically.

"You think so?"

"I sure do. Love that hat—whatever you call it," he said. "Carry your books?"

They were a block away from the school when a classmate, Pam Sanford, who had been appointed lookout, spied them. She raced to their first-period class and said, "Okay, guys. They're on the way!" At once everyone dropped into a seat.

Amy and Brent entered the building and walked down the corridor. When they were at the door to their classroom, Brent could sense Amy withdrawing within herself. He gripped her arm, and they both started into the room.

The sight that greeted Amy made tears of relief come to her eyes. Every girl in the class was wearing a surgeon's cap, neatly held in place by bobby pins. And they were smiling. One girl cried out, "Amy!" and started toward her for an embrace. Soon all the girls crowded around her, welcoming her.

As arranged, their teacher, Mr. Hitchins, entered the room late. Pretending his usual pedagogical severity, he said, "Well, now, shall we risk learning something about American history today?" Then he smiled and said, "Welcome back, Amy Bedford."

Chapter Five

Two more weeks had gone by. It was another day, another early morning. Walter Duncan was standing at the kitchen table downing his coffee when Emily came in, drawing her robe around her.

"Hi, hon. Did I wake you?" he asked.

"No," Emily said. "I'd love to make you some breakfast."

"Thanks. But I've got to be in the OR before seven. Then have to spend half my day in court. That Enright thing."

"I hope it doesn't get messy."

"Whenever a doctor botches a case, it gets messy," Walt said. "Anyhow, my part of it should be over today." He kissed her and was on his way to the garage when he remembered. "By the way, is Simmie getting a cold?"

"Not getting, got," Emily corrected.

"Take her temp. If she's got any fever, keep her home."

HE WAS pulling into the parking lot at the hospital when he suddenly braked. He sat there itemizing in his mind the isolated facts he had noticed about his daughter during recent months: slight fever, paleness, compliant attitude, those bruises. Could a doctor become so immersed in his own specialty that he forgot all those other symptoms he knew so well as an intern?

No time for that now. He had to scrub for surgery.

After he had finished his three cases for the morning and changed from OR greens back into his own clothes, Walt went down to his office. As soon as he opened the door his secretary, Claudia, greeted him with a message.

"Mr. Silverstein called. He needs you in court after lunch."

"I'll be there," Walt replied. "How long will you be here?"

"Late as you want. Something up?" the young woman asked.

"Remind me."

"Of what?" she asked, puzzled.

"Just remind me. I'll know what," he said. "Oh, by the way, Amy Bedford. Her new X rays?"

"I checked. She's in radiology right now."

"Good. I'll stop by and see them after court."

Once he left, Claudia printed in large letters on a sheet of plain paper THIS IS TO REMIND YOU, then mounted the sign prominently on his desk.

As Walter Duncan entered the courtroom he saw at once that Dr. Peter Enright was seated at the counsel's table, alongside his lawyer. Walt realized he would have to confront his hostile former colleague while giving testimony.

Walt was in the witness chair and had taken the oath when Andrew Silverstein, counsel for the eighteen-year-old plaintiff, came forward to ask, "Doctor, will you tell the jury your background and credentials?"

Walt recited the details of his education and experience.

Silverstein then turned to the bench. "Your Honor, is there any objection to Dr. Duncan's qualifications for giving expert opinion in this case?"

The judge addressed the opposing lawyer. "Counsel?"

"No objection," the defense attorney replied as he seized his pencil and yellow pad, ready to frame the questions he would put to Walt on cross-examination.

"Doctor, have you made a study of the entire file in this case?" Silverstein asked.

"I have."

"And have you examined this young plaintiff seated here?"

"I have," Walter replied.

"Will you tell the jury the condition in which you found this young man?"

"The general state of his health was good. But he suffered a noticeable dropped left foot."

"Did you determine the cause of that condition?"

"I did. It is clear from the patient's file that the fifth lumbar spinal nerve root, what we call L-five, was severed in an attempt to remove a herniated disk—the result of an apparent football injury. When you sever the L-five, a dropped foot will result, and a patient loses the ability to control his step. A permanent brace may be necessary."

"In your opinion, Doctor, is the severing of such a nerve during this procedure the result of faulty medical and surgical practice?"

Walter Duncan looked at Peter Enright, who stared back at him, half defiant, half fearful. Walt stated, "There is no doubt of it in my mind. The treatment performed here was not in keeping with the standards of medicine and surgery practiced in this community."

"Now, Doctor, if a young man of sixteen and a half, who had been injured in a football game and suffered sciatic pain extending down to his foot, and who showed signs of muscle weakness in that leg, came to you for treatment, what would you have done?"

"First a complete examination to determine the extent of the injury," Walt said.

"Dr. Enright did that, didn't he?" Silverstein said.

"Yes, he did," Walt conceded.

"And would you also have taken X rays of the patient?"

"Of course."

"Well, didn't Dr. Enright do that?"

"Yes, he did," Walter said.

"Didn't he go even further and do an electromyogram to test nerve conductivity to the painful leg?"

"Yes, he did."

"And would you have done that?"

"Yes, I would," Walt replied, growing a little impatient.

"Then, Doctor, in your expert opinion, how was the treatment of this case faulty?"

Walt realized now that Silverstein had cleared the way for him to testify in detail. He launched into his explanation, speaking directly to the jury.

"The X rays and the electromyogram could serve only one purpose: to reveal the source of the pain, the herniated disk. Now, faced with that finding, a careful doctor doesn't rush in and do surgery. You confine the patient to bed—to rest that area, reduce the inflammation of the nerve that is causing the pain. If that doesn't work, you put the patient into traction. Either at home or in a hospital. In other words, you give that young body a chance to heal itself. Four weeks, five, six, if need be. Then, only if bed rest and traction have failed would a good, careful surgeon consider invading the patient's body. Surgery is the last thing you do, not the first."

Walter Duncan shifted in his chair to face the counsel's table at which Peter Enright and his lawyer sat.

"And if you do surgery, you do it carefully! You don't leave a young man with a dropped foot and a leg brace for life!"

Silverstein waited patiently until Walt Duncan had finished. "Would you say then, Doctor, that the defendant in this case was guilty of malpractice?"

Walter Duncan nodded, then said, "Yes. Yes, I think there was malpractice."

"Thank you, Dr. Duncan."

For another forty-five minutes Walter Duncan endured a grueling cross-examination by Peter Enright's lawyer. But he didn't budge from his testimony.

On his way out of the courtroom he passed the counsel's table and Peter Enright. The surgeon glared at him. But Walt rushed by to get back to the hospital, where two new patients awaited him and there were his postop rounds to make. The courthouse elevators being slow, he raced down the three flights of stairs to the street, where he slid into his car.

As he drove he felt himself in the grip of such an unusual compulsion that he had to force himself to slow down. At the traffic light he realized the source of his urgency. He must conclude his day as quickly as possible and get home. To Simone.

HE HAD parked his car and was starting for the side entrance to the hospital when Alan Bridges, a colleague on the orthopedic staff, emerged.

"Hi, Alan," Walt greeted him.

"How did it go?" Bridges asked.

"Go? What?" Walt asked, confused for a moment.

" 'What?' " Bridges repeated angrily. "Is that all it meant to you? Something to do and then forget?"

"What are you talking about, Alan?"

"I am talking about what you've just done to every doctor who does orthopedic surgery!"

"Oh, you mean testifying," Walt said.

"Yes! That's what I mean. You and Sy may think it's a highly ethical thing you two conspired to do. But I would like to remind you what legal cases like this can mean to our malpractice insurance premiums, which are sky-high already. And who knows how much higher they will go!"

"Alan, before you go blowing off steam, did you examine the patient's file? Did you see the patient?"

"I didn't have to. I take it for granted that given a certain number of surgical procedures there is going to be an accident here and there, an unexpected outcome."

"This was no accident. It was lousy surgery!" Walt exploded.

"And if it was?" Bridges demanded. "To help one kid, you decided to penalize thousands of surgeons who had nothing to do with that kid. You and Sy made a very foolish choice when you decided to step into that case!"

"Sorry you feel that way," Walt Duncan said, pushing his way through the door.

"I'm not the only one who does!" Bridges called after him.

It sounded like a threat. But Walt Duncan had no time to consider it. Rounds. New patients. Then home. Simone.

AT THE close of his end-of-day rounds the beeper in the breast pocket of Walt's white lab coat summoned him. He picked up the nearest telephone. "Duncan," he announced.

"Walt, this is Sy. Come to my consultation room at once!"

When he arrived, the room was dark except for the light from the viewing screen. That light was filtered through a number of X rays and scans that hung in pairs. As soon as Walt saw the dates on the X rays he knew who the patient was. March 14, 1987. May 25, 1987. Amy Bedford's first X rays and now her latest, taken early in the day.

"Take a look, Walt. Take a look!" Sy invited.

Walt stared at the films. Each set, before and after, proved one thing: Amy's invasive tumor had shrunk.

"That's all we have to know," Walt said.

"Schedule her. Right away," Sy said.

"Right!"

Walt returned to his office. Though it was past seven o'clock, he found his secretary still waiting.

"Claudia, what are you doing here at this hour?"

"The way you asked me to remind you this morning, I thought I'd stay on and remind you in person. What can I do for you?"

"Get Amy Bedford on the phone. If her mother is there, have her pick up the extension."

As he continued on into his office the intercom buzzed.

"Doctor, Amy and her mother are both on the phone."

"Thanks, Claudia. Now go home!" He pressed the lighted button to pick up the line to the Bedford home. "Amy?"

"Yes, Doctor." He could sense the expectation as well as the fear in her young voice.

"Amy Bedford, from now on I am going to hold you up as an example to all my patients who have to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous chemotherapy."

"Doctor—" Amy started to ask but dared go no further.

"Yes, Amy. You did it! Dr. Rosen and I just went over your X rays and scans. The tumor has shrunk enough for us to agree that surgery is now indicated."

"Oh, Doctor—" The girl broke into tears.

"Doctor," Marion Bedford interjected, "when do you want her at the hospital?"

"I'll arrange OR time and a room in the morning. The operation will surely be within the week. Meantime, let's all feel that we've won the first battle in a long war. Sleep well tonight, Amy."

"Thank you, Doctor. Thanks so much," the girl said.

As Walt hung up the receiver he saw Claudia's reminder. He hesitated before he turned to the wall of medical textbooks behind his desk chair. He pulled down one large volume, searched through it and began to read:

Frequently presents itself with an abrupt onset of fever. Patient may seem listless, compliant. Ecchymoses and other skin changes may appear.

He allowed the volume to drop to his desk. For the signs and symptoms he had just read related to a disease that, like osteogenic sarcoma, attacked the young in far greater numbers than the old: acute leukemia.

Like all parents confronted by such a terrifying possibility, his first reaction was to deny it. There were differences between these signs and the ones Simone presented. The book also said, "Bleeding from the mouth and nose may be present." Simone had none of that. "Enlargement of the liver and the lymph nodes . . ." He must palpate her for that as soon as possible.

All the way home he considered ways in which to carry out his purpose without arousing concern in his wife.

He turned into the driveway, came in through the garage door and called, "Hi, hon! I'm home!" Emily called back to him from upstairs. She came down to greet him with a kiss.

"Simmie still awake?" he asked as casually as he could.

"We were just going over her book report for tomorrow. You know, she has a real talent for using words. I wouldn't be surprised if someday she turns out to be a writer."

"I'll go up and say good night to our budding genius," he joked.

As he reached the top of the stairs he saw the light at the base of her door go out. He had wanted to get to her before she settled down for the night. He knocked.

"Simmie, it's Dad. Can I come in?"

"Of course, Daddy."

She did not turn on the light, expecting, as on most late nights, he would kiss her and snuggle a bit before she went to sleep.

He approached her bed, sat down on the edge, leaned to her and kissed her. "Baby," he said, "how are you feeling?"

"Fine!" she replied.

"Any more of those black-and-blue marks?" he asked.

"No."

"I don't believe it," he said, pretending to protest.

"I'll show you," she said.

Eager to prove herself, she reached for the lamp on the night table and turned it on. She pulled up the top of her pajamas, exposing her back to him.

"Go ahead, Daddy, look!"

He made a close examination and found no blemishes. He started to massage her back, asking, "There, how does that feel?"

"Great," she said.

As he massaged he turned her gradually until she was lying on her back. He continued rubbing, eventually concentrating on her stomach, especially the area just below her ribs. There he pressed firmly until she squirmed in slight discomfort.

"Sorry, baby," he said. But his sensitive fingers had detected a slight enlargement of her liver. He gently rubbed her neck so that he could palpate her lymph nodes, but he could detect nothing.

Further observation is demanded, he decided.

Emily came upstairs to call, "Walt? Dinner's ready." She entered the room, discovered them and asked, "Something wrong?"

"No," he said. "Just giving a little relaxing massage." He turned to Simone. "Now, baby, get to sleep."

THREE days later, attired in his white lab coat, Walter Duncan strode down the hall of the hospital basement to the workshop of Hans Metterling. There he found the technician studying a titanium appliance he had crafted to fit specifications determined with the aid of a highly ingenious computer.

Hans demonstrated the slender, shiny device that would replace Amy Bedford's diseased bones. It flexed easily at the knee joint, which was made of a strong, durable plastic that should last Amy for years, possibly for her lifetime.

Walt examined it carefully, then asked, "How much leeway?"

The old craftsman proceeded to demonstrate how expanding rings on the prosthesis could lengthen it. Amy Bedford's X rays indicated that she had some growth left in her. When that occurred, Walt could perform fairly simple surgery and lengthen the prosthesis with a few turns so it could keep up with the natural growth of her other leg. If all went according to plan, she would never be forced to suffer awkward walking or running.

If all went according to plan.

That reservation overshadowed all of Walt's thoughts.

Hans wrapped the prosthesis tenderly in its plastic covering, presented it to the surgeon and said a soft, very sincere, "Good luck, Valter. She is a nice girl."

With the device in his possession Walt Duncan faced his last and usually most difficult presurgical obligation. He stopped by his office. Claudia had a long legal form waiting for him. He took it and started up to the second floor of the pediatric pavilion.

As he had requested, the Bedfords were waiting at their daughter's bedside. Walt could tell at a glance that Marion Bedford had not slept the whole night. Her eyes betrayed it. Ed Bedford was by his daughter's side, seated on the bed, holding her hand.

"Amy," Walt said, "I want you to meet something that is going to become a part of you. You might even want to give it a name. Like Hansi. Why not? The Academy Awards are called Oscars. The TV awards are called Emmys. Well, this is a Hansi."

He carefully removed the plastic wrapping and presented the silver-colored device, holding it up, flexing the knee joint.

"See how it moves—easily, naturally, like your own knee joint. And it's yours, yours alone. It wouldn't fit anyone else in this world. And tomorrow it will become a part of you for the rest of your life."

Walt rewrapped the device as he spoke, to be free for his next step. He felt the upper left-hand pocket of his lab coat to make sure the paper was there.

"Hansi wasn't the only reason I asked for all of you to be here today. We have a formality to complete before surgery can be performed." He presented the single printed sheet.

"This spells out the procedure I am going to perform, and that you agreed to. Amy, since you're still a minor, legally it should be signed by your father or your mother. I want you to sign it too."

The girl glanced up at him. She then looked to her father, who seemed as puzzled as she, and as tense.

"Amy, despite all the advanced tests, in a case like yours, when we go in surgically, we can still be confronted with findings we did not expect."

"What kind of findings?" her mother demanded immediately.

Amy gripped her father's hand tighter.

"Amy, I want you to read this sentence," Walt said, running his finger along the form.

Her father intervened. "I'll see that first!"

Walt surrendered the form to him. Ed Bedford read the words. Slowly he lowered the page. He stared at Walt Duncan. In a strained voice he said, "I thought this was being done to avoid anything like what's written here."

"It is," Walt said. "But as I said, we can't be sure until we get in there."

"I want to see it," Amy demanded.

Walt took the paper from her father and gave it to the girl. She stared at it. Walt's finger pointed to the words "We understand and consent that if it is deemed medically indicated for the patient's health and survival, the surgeon is authorized to perform an amputation of the area involved."

"Amputation." Amy was barely able to utter the word. "But you said, Give me a year . . ."

Walt leaned close to the girl. "Amy, yes, I said, 'One year of your life and I'll cure you.' And I will do my darnedest to accomplish that. But I have seen what can happen in the operating room. A surgeon goes in armed with all the best data and knowledge, but he finds that nature has tricked him. What seemed like healthy bone or tissue turns out not to be. Then the surgeon has no choice. He must save the patient's life."

"If you take off my leg, I don't want to live!"

"Yes, Amy, you do want to live," Walt said. "You're too brave, too fine a person to want to give up your life now. Amy, sign this. Your signature may not have legal importance, but it's important to me. Because it is your expression of faith in your surgeon."

Amy stared at the document and shook her head. "I can't," she protested. She turned to bury her face in her father's shoulder. He patted her gently on the cheek, stared across her at Walt.

"Doctor, do you need this in order to proceed?"

"We can't do surgery without an informed consent."

"You'll do your best to save her leg?"

"You know I will."

"Okay," Ed Bedford said more calmly than Walt had expected. "My daughter's life means everything to me." He took a pen out of his inner breast pocket, and holding the form against the wall, he wrote his name more shakily than he had ever done before.

Receiving the signed form, Walt asked softly, "Amy?"

"I can't. I can't," she repeated, without looking up.

Chapter Six

It was late in the afternoon. Marion Bedford sat in the leather lounge chair in the corner of the hospital room, staring at her daughter, who lay atop her bed. They had not spoken for more than an hour, mother and daughter. They had not even tried to console one another. They did not know how.

Eventually Marion Bedford became aware that Amy's breathing had settled down. She had dozed off, thankfully. Mrs. Bedford slipped out of the room to make some inquiries at the nurses' station.

Amy was still dozing when her door eased open. She woke and turned toward the door, expecting the nurse, more medication, another test. She found a young man in his twenties, tall, quite good-looking.

"Amy Bedford?" he asked, pausing in the doorway. She nodded. "May I come in?"

"Yes."

He came to stand at the foot of her bed. "My name is Josh Tedrow. Dr. Duncan asked me to stop by. Mind if I sit down?"

"No," Amy replied, puzzled.

He crossed the room to the lounge chair. "Walt said that with surgery approaching you might be feeling a little queasy."

"After all the chemo I've had, queasy is a very small word for what I feel," Amy said.

"Isn't it hell?" the young man remarked. He rose from the chair, approached Amy. He leaned against the foot of the bed. "I'll bet there were times when you said, 'If this is getting cured, I'd rather die.' "

"More than once."

"And times when you felt so lousy that you wanted to call Walt and curse him out?"

"More than twice," Amy said.

"Well, I actually did it," he said, moving to the chair by her bed. He sat down and crossed his legs. He leaned in her direction, as if to impart a secret. "I got him on the phone one night. I told him to hell with his chemo, with his surgery and with him."

"You, you had surgery?" Amy asked, surprised.

"Yes. Same as you're going to have," he said.

"But you . . ." She did not say it.

She did not have to. He said it for her. "I look all right. I move well. And you never noticed." He patted his left leg. "This is the one. Now I do everything I want. Walk, run, swim, sail, golf."

"He asked you to tell me this, didn't he?"

"Part of my deal with him. If he cured me, I promised I would do this every time he asks." Tedrow smiled. "It's the best deal I ever made."

He uncrossed his legs, rose from the chair, took her hand. "Amy, I was just about your age. Just as scared. Just as debilitated from the chemo. Just as hopeless in some moments, wondering why God had picked me. But then Walt would come in, with his big smile, his confidence, and I'd say, I'm going with him all the way. I'm reaching for life, and he's going to help me get it!"

"You went through the same thing—all of it?" Amy asked.

"All of it. And here I am, six years later. You can do it, Amy. Just go into that operation tomorrow saying that, believing that."

Her mother came into the room. Tedrow winked at Amy. He turned and said, "Mrs. Bedford, she's going to be okay." He left.

Once the door closed, Marion Bedford asked, "Who is he?"

"Josh Tedrow."

"Isn't he a little old to be a friend of yours?"

"Maybe. But he is. He is."

There was a soft, almost apologetic knock at the door. Mother and daughter both turned. The door eased open silently. A ruddy-faced, white-haired man peered in, smiling.

"Swede!" Amy cried out, her first impulse one of joy to see her old coach. Then her blue eyes filled with tears.

"I came to wish you luck tomorrow," Swede said. He smiled. "Like before a big match. You know, those nervous minutes before you go out on the court. When everything feels tight, and your hands are cold. Let me have your hands."

She held out her hands to him. He took them in his, and they were indeed cold.

"Good," he said. "I like it when a player is nervous before a match. One should never be overconfident."

He was rubbing her cold hands as he talked.

"Tomorrow, that's going to be like a match. So you be up for it. Say to yourself, No matter what I find when I wake up, I will face it. I will overcome it. Remember the first time you went to the finals? I said to you, 'Play one point at a time. Don't look back at your errors. Don't look forward to the next game. Play this point.' You believed me. And you did win. You went all the way. Because you knew that to lose a point, or even a game, is not to lose the whole match. Every time you come up to that service line, it's a new point. Well, tomorrow is like that, Amy. If you lose a point or two, there's still the whole match left to play. And my girl, my Amy, is not going to let down. No matter what happens. Right?"

She stared into his delft-blue eyes. "Did Dr. Duncan ask you to come here?"

"No," he said quite simply and honestly.

"Someone did," she insisted.

"Yes. Your father," Swede admitted.

"My father?" She seemed surprised.

"He said he couldn't do it. He didn't know how. But he wanted someone to say to you, No matter what happens tomorrow, there's a whole life before you. He wants you to go into that operating room with the same eagerness, the same fight as when you go into a match. And come out the same way, no matter what happens."

"I may never be able to play again. Or run. Or even walk straight again."

"Amy, my dear, is that what you think life is? All those things you said, they disappear anyhow. Slowly perhaps. But the time comes when all of us can't play anymore. But we live on. We find our place. We do the best we can with what we are. That's what life really is. Whether we are sixteen or sixty, we do the best we can. You've always done that. That's what made you a champion. Be my champion tomorrow, Amy. Promise?"

She began to weep but managed a smile and nodded.

"That's my girl," Swede said. He kissed her wet cheeks.

Before Walter Duncan left the hospital for the evening, he dropped by Amy's room to say good night. He found her alone.

"How do you feel, Amy? Ready?"

"Josh Tedrow was here today," she said.

"Nice young man, Josh."

"You cured him. He said he made a deal with you. To come speak to any patient you asked him to."

"He's never turned me down. Never too busy. He's lived up to his part of the bargain. And you will too."

"Me?"

"Yes. That's the only thing I am ever going to ask of you. That when you're cured, you'll do the same—give some other kid the courage it takes when he's coming up to the wire."

"I wouldn't know how to do that," Amy said.

"When the time comes, you'll know," Walt said confidently. He patted her hand. "Ready, Amy?"

"I'm ready," she said with conviction.

"Good," he said. "See you in the morning."

When he was at the door, she called out, "Doctor? That form you wanted me to sign. If you still want me to, I'll sign it now."

He stared at her. She stared back. Smiling. The look in her clear blue eyes was strong and determined.

On the way back to his office to check on late calls Walt realized that his momentary satisfaction with Amy's signature on the consent form had turned to a disturbing sense of guilt.

By the time he reached his office, he realized why. His emotional involvement in Amy's case had roots deeper than were first apparent. Amy had become like a second daughter to him. But he also had concerns about his own daughter.

He wondered, Am I being a parent instead of a physician? I should already have turned Simmie over to another doctor. Well, I will. But first one more test. Without alarming Simmie or Emily I will do it. Tonight.

"I'm going to take a blood sample from Simmie," he said to Emily. When his wife reacted with surprise, he explained. "I think that cold may have left her with a low-grade infection. I'd like to track it down so we can treat it."

"Good idea," Emily agreed. "Want me to help?"

"Would you?"

While Walt Duncan prepared a hypodermic, Emily broached the subject to Simone.

"Darling, Daddy only wants to get the littlest bit of blood from you. So he can take it to the hospital and have it analyzed. That way we can get rid of your cold."

Emily held Simmie on her lap while Walt deftly inserted the needle into a vein in her thin arm. He drew up the plunger slowly, filling the glass tube with bright red blood. He injected the blood into a small specimen vial and sealed it.

In the morning he would give it to Victor Ogura, the hematologist in the hospital for whom he had the highest regard.

VERY early the next day Walter Duncan stopped by Ogura's office, where the Japanese hematologist was already at work.

"Hi, Vic."

"Walt" was all Ogura said as he turned from his microscope. "What's up?"

Walt handed him the vial of blood, which had been kept under refrigeration since the night before.

"Oh, okay," Ogura said as he took the vial.

"Vic, as soon as you know, call me."

"Of course. What are we looking for—sarcoma cells?"

"Just tell me what you find. Okay?"

"Okay." Something about Walt's evasiveness made Ogura ask, "Who is it, Walt? Special patient?"

"No. Routine. Just tell me."

"I'll run it through right away."

AT SEVEN a.m. Amy Bedford was wheeled through the doors of a large operating room into what seemed a maze of overhead lights and electronic instruments. She felt herself being lifted off the gurney and onto the operating table. She stared up at the lights. They blinded her for a moment. She looked about and saw no faces, only eyes and masks. From behind one mask came a familiar voice.

"Amy . . ."

It was her pediatrician, Dr. Corey. The man standing beside him had warm, compassionate eyes that she recognized.

"Dr. Rosen?"

"Yes, Amy." He then proceeded to introduce every member of the masked team and identified their functions during the surgery.

The anesthesiologist was affixing monitoring sensors to Amy's body as Walter Duncan entered the OR from the adjacent scrub area. He held up his hands, and a nurse pulled thin surgical gloves down over his outstretched fingers.

"Ready, Amy?"

"Yes, Doctor," she said.

He gave the anesthesiologist a head gesture. The man proceeded to feed barbiturates into an IV in her arm. While Walt waited for a signal from the anesthesiologist, he glanced at the wall clock. He felt almost as if he had another pressing engagement. It was not his habit. Once he was in the OR, he had no time frame. Only the patient under his hands mattered. Suddenly Walt realized he was wondering not about the operation but about how far along Victor Ogura was with that specimen of Simone's blood.

The anesthesiologist began signaling. The patient was under and ready. Walt did not respond by word or action.

"Walt," the anesthesiologist prodded.

Even Sy Rosen noticed. He bent closer, to ask in a whisper, "Walt, you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right. Why?"

"Well, I've never seen you hesitate like this. If you're not feeling well, let's not begin."

"I'm feeling fine. Fine!" he protested, and held out his hand.

Scalpel in hand, Walt knew that from this moment on he must forget about everything except Amy Bedford, whose future would depend on what happened in the next three or four hours.

He would be battling nature, which could be tricky and cruel in such situations. No one could predict with certainty what he would find. Any of a dozen times during the procedure if he found tissue, arteries, veins, nerves or edges of bone to be cancerous, he would have no choice but to amputate.

With such concerns in mind Walt Duncan made the first long, frontal incision from Amy's mid-calf to halfway up her thigh.

Carefully he retracted the tissue to reach the femoral artery and then the vein. Walt teased them away from the area of bone, peering closely as he examined them. He could breathe a bit easier. There was no sign of tumor attached to either long vessel.

That hurdle passed, he then concentrated on the sciatic nerve. Again, clean. Now with the same exquisite care he examined the peroneal nerve. Luck was with him. Clean.

He was staring down now at the exposed bones, from mid-calf to mid-thigh, the patella, or kneecap, joining the two. Careful measurements had delineated the area of cancerous bone. He marked off the limits of diseased bone and a safe margin of healthy-appearing bone below on the tibia and above on the femur.

Now he had only one shot at it. If he cut through the bones and the seemingly safe margin turned out to be involved with cancer cells, again he would have no choice. Amputation. So this next move had to be perfect.

He stared at the markings he had made. Finally he held out his hand. The chief nurse passed a high-speed electric saw to him. At the designated places on the tibia and the femur he cut swiftly, cleanly. He removed the patella and passed it to the nurse to be saved for later in the procedure.

Now came the ultimate test, which would decide Amy's fate during the operation. Walt scooped out samples of bone above and below the excisions. He dispatched a nurse to the lab for an immediate frozen section to determine if the margins were healthy. It would take minutes, long minutes that would seem like hours, until the pathologist would phone back his report.

There was nothing to do but wait. Walt Duncan looked up at the wall clock. It had been more than an hour since the surgery had begun. During that time had Ogura examined Simmie's blood sample? Let it be benign, Walt prayed. Let all those signs and symptoms turn out to be just that, signs and symptoms that did not add up to any dread diagnosis.

Sy Rosen detected his uneasiness. Unaware of Simmie's condition, he said, "Don't worry, Walt. I think you got it all. You certainly left safe margins."

Walt did not appear to be encouraged, Sy noticed.

The phone rang. Every head in the operating room turned in its direction. A nurse answered it. She smiled, looked to Walt and nodded. He did not accept that as the final word. He approached the phone. The nurse held it to his ear.

"Peter. Walt. Let me have it."

"Clean," the voice came back. "All samples clean."

"No question?"

"Not in my mind. Of course we'll put it through the regular lab procedure. But I've never seen cleaner."

"Thanks, Peter."

Walt returned to the table. The chief nurse passed him the shiny titanium prosthesis. He flexed it at the knee to reassure himself that it would work easily, comfortably. That done, he drilled an indentation in the top of Amy's tibia and packed it with surgical cement. While the cement was still fresh and soft, he sank the pointed lower end of the prosthesis into it. Once he had safely anchored it there, he extended the upper end of the device and locked it onto the lower end of Amy's femur. The metal skeleton was now firmly entrenched.

He signaled the nurse for the patella that he had removed earlier. Using small, strong stainless steel screws, he affixed it to the plastic knee joint of the prosthesis.

Next he worked slowly, gradually manipulating the muscles of Amy's calf over the prosthesis. He then proceeded to bring the skin over the muscles and close the incision. His final step was to encase Amy's entire leg in a Jordan splint—a cast with Velcro closures—so he could open it easily to observe how the wound was progressing.

Amy Bedford was now ready to be removed to the recovery room. As she was being wheeled out Walt Duncan ripped off his surgical gloves.

"Excellent, Walt. First-rate surgery," Sy said.

Dr. Corey, Amy's pediatrician, patted him on the shoulder. "I don't witness much surgery. But I know an artist at work when I see one. Shall we go up and see the Bedfords? They'll want to know. You know how parents are."

Walt wanted to reply, Yes, yes, I know very well how parents are. Today more than ever. Instead, he said, "Of course. They'll want to know right away."

Chapter Seven

A DOZEN times Walter Duncan looked at the message he had found on his desk when he finally returned to his office. "Dr. Ogura called. Call him. Urgent." A dozen times Walt tried to interrupt the pressures of his own practice to make that call. Twice he did. Only to discover that Ogura was out.

It was just past six o'clock in the evening before the two doctors could make contact.

"Vic, what did you find?"

"Walt, can you come down to my lab for a minute?"

"Of course. Right away."

Walt raced down three flights of stairs. He was breathless when he burst into Ogura's lab.

"Vic, what is it?" he demanded.

"Walt, I don't know what this patient is seeing you for, but I would consider this the more serious problem. I suggest we take a bone marrow sample, and—"

"Bone marrow sample?" Walt interrupted.

"Yes. It's clearly indicated by the abnormal blasts in the blood smear. . . . Walt, what's the matter with you?"

"It—she—" Walter tried to say.

Aware that his colleague's face had turned pale, Ogura said, "Walt, here. Sit down." Walt sank into a chair. His face was now not only pale but damp as well. "Are you all right?"

Walter Duncan nodded. He breathed slowly but shallowly, trying to regain control. Then he said in a soft, hoarse voice, "Vic, the patient—is not a patient."

Confused, Ogura asked, "Then, who?"

"Simone," Walt said in a whisper.

"Oh my God!" Ogura exclaimed.

"Tell me everything," Walt insisted.

"Findings like these demand a bone marrow sample for biopsy, so we can make a definitive diagnosis."

"What's your educated guess?"

"Leukemia," Victor Ogura said. "I'm so sorry, Walt."

Walter Duncan nodded and turned away.

"Have her in. Let's take that marrow sample. Then we'll know a good deal more," Ogura said. "Walt, these days the percentages are much better than they ever were. When I first started in—"

Walter Duncan interrupted, exploding. "Don't quote me percentages! I am only interested in . . ."

He said no more and fled the lab. Victor Ogura debated what he should do now. Finally he placed a phone call. When he received an answer, he said, "Sy, can I come right up and see you?"

Sy Rosen found Walter Duncan in his office, staring out the window at the evening darkness. He had not responded to the sound of the door being opened.

"Walt, Victor just told me," Sy began.

No response.

"Walt, I know it's like a knife in the heart. And nothing I might say can change it."

Walt Duncan remained silent.

"Someone has to tell Emily."

Without turning to face him, Walt said, "I will tell her tonight."

"And Simone? What will you tell her when you have to bring her in for the bone marrow biopsy?"

"As little as possible," Walt said. He turned to face Sy. "She won't know the truth until I can't keep it from her. And don't argue with me, Sy. She's my daughter! Can you understand that? No, I guess you can't understand that."

He was venting his frustration by attacking his friend and mentor, by pointing out Sy's life as an unmarried, childless man. He recanted at once. "I'm sorry, Sy. Forgive me?"

"I forgave you even before you asked," Sy said. "Nor do I blame you. There is no torment worse than seeing loved ones facing death and being unable to prevent it."

Something in Sy's voice forced Walt to look into his eyes.

"Yes, I know. I was already a young physician in Poland when we were taken away. My whole family. I had been expelled from the staff of the hospital in Breslau. So I went home to get my mother and two sisters out of the little town in which my father had been the village doctor before he died. I had a plan to get them safely to Switzerland. Unfortunately, I was too late.

"We were held two long days and nights in the synagogue, which had been turned into a prison. Afterward they marched us to a railroad siding. And up the ramp into cattle cars. Another three days on the train. Cold. Without food. Without water.

"We ended up in two camps. One for women. One for men. Separated only by a high fence of barbed wire. We could almost touch each other. I watched them always. My mother, my two sisters. I could also watch the smoke rising from the row of chimneys. And I knew that odor.

"They disappeared one by one. My mother first. Then Esther. And finally my little sister, Miriam. All I could do was watch. And you want to give me lessons in frustration, in hopelessness?"

"Sy, you never told me."

"I had no reason to tell you—until now," the elderly man said. "My boy, if I may suggest, do tell Emily. Tonight. Gently if you can. I will arrange for Simone to have that bone marrow biopsy before the week is out. But first, Emily."

DINNER was interminable. Walt tried to smile and laugh during Simone's mimicking of one of her teachers. He watched every mouthful of food she ate, as if nourishment could influence the course of her condition.

He could barely wait until it was time for her to go up to bed. He went with her, watched her get ready, kissed her, tucked her in. At the door he turned for one last glimpse. She peeked from beneath her coverlet to smile at him. He blew her a kiss.

Surely Simone did not exhibit the signs tonight. Perhaps it would all turn out to be a laboratory mistake, he thought, then realized he was thinking like a parent again, not like a surgeon. Victor Ogura did not make such mistakes.

Walt waited until Emily had cleared the table and joined him in the den. He had rehearsed several different ways he would introduce the subject. Emily circumvented all of them by asking, "All right, Walt, what is it?"

Taken by surprise, he merely glanced at her.

"Walt, I am not a fool. Yesterday you took a blood sample from our daughter. Tonight you act very strangely. All through dinner you laugh a little too often and too heartily. You can't take your eyes off Simone. Now, what is it?'

"Darling, sit down," he said simply.

She slid into a chair opposite him. "Tell me!"

"There is a possibility— No, I won't lie to you. There is preliminary proof that Simone has leukemia."

Tears welled up in Emily's eyes, but she did not cry. She was determined not to. "And?" was all she could say.

"I'll have to take her into the hospital so we can do a bone marrow biopsy on her."

"Will it hurt?" was the first question Emily asked.

"I'll make sure that it won't," he promised.

They were silent for some minutes before he said, "These days they do miraculous things with chemo in juvenile leukemia."

"Children still die, though," she said quietly.

"But the odds are in her favor. Seventy, eighty percent, for certain types of leukemia," he said encouragingly.

"Which means that one out of every five dies," Emily said.

"We'll make sure she isn't one of them," Walt said as firmly as his surgeon's mind would permit.

He was relieved that she had not cried. For if she had, he knew he would have broken too. Slowly, silently, they went to bed.

It was still dark out when he woke. He felt the bed. He was alone. He rose, went down the stairs, whispering, "Emily? Honey?" There was no answer.

He went into the den. There he found Emily. She was in a chair, crouched into a ball, her nightgown pulled around her.

"Been up long?" he asked.

She shrugged.

"You mustn't make it seem worse than it is."

"Why did it happen to her?" Emily asked.

"Nobody knows."

"X rays. I've read that X rays can cause cancer. Especially leukemia. Didn't that happen in Hiroshima? All that radiation from the bomb, didn't the leukemia rate go way up?"

"Up," he admitted. "But not so much as people believe. And what's that got to do with Simmie?"

"Her braces," Emily said. "Orthodontia calls for frequent X rays. To make sure how things are progressing."

"Emily, darling, a child does not get enough X rays in the course of such treatment to affect anything," Walt said.

"If it wasn't X rays, what was it?" she persisted.

"We don't know. We may never know. So there's no use pursuing that. We've got to look ahead. To the definitive diagnosis. To the treatment. To the results."

"But, if—" Emily started to say, then began to tremble and finally sob for the first time since he had told her.

Walt lifted her out of the chair to embrace her and warm her. As he held her he pressed his face against her head and spoke softly.

"Darling, Simmie most likely has leukemia. The question is, What do we do about it? We see her through the biopsy. If the results are bad, we put our heads together and arrive at the best treatment. And then we see her through that."

She nodded but continued to weep.

"Now come back to bed. You have to keep up your strength for her sake as well as your own. Simmie's going to need you in the months to come. Need you a great deal. The chemo. And whatever else they have to do."

He led her up the stairs and past Simone's room to their bedroom. He made her take a pill that would allow her to get some sleep. Once the pill had had its effect, he slipped into Simone's room. He sat in her too-small white rocking chair and stared at his daughter. She slept peacefully, unaware of her parents' fears, her innocent face lit only by the glow of the night-light.

"YOU'LL be easy with her" was Walter Duncan's instruction to his colleague, Herbert Coleman, who was scrubbing to go in and secure bone marrow samples for Simone's biopsy.

"Walt," Sy Rosen intervened, "I'll be there. Emily will be there. We'll see that Simone feels secure and safe."

"I'd be there myself—" Walt started to say.

"Walt," Sy interrupted, "you have patients waiting."

Walt hesitated a moment, then realized that he had better leave. His presence might distract Coleman. Sy would see that his godchild was made as comfortable as possible.

A short time later Walt peeked into Amy Bedford's room to see if she was awake. She was. She lay on her back, staring up at the ceiling. Her cheeks were wet. Despite his own concerns, he could tell this child needed cheering up.

"Well, Amy, good news!" he announced as he entered.

She turned to him.

"We got the lab reports back," he said.

"I thought you got the lab reports during the operation."

"Those reports were okay. But we don't stop there. We take thirty samples along the bones we removed. And we submit each of them to examination to see if they're clean. And you passed! One hundred percent perfect. Now let's look at that wound."

He opened the closures of the temporary cast that encased her leg. He studied the long red scar, his keen eyes searching for any sign of improper healing. Her leg looked fine. As he closed the cast he said, "That wasn't so bad, was it, Amy?"

"Doctor, are you all right?" she asked.

"Of course I'm all right. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. Today you seem different somehow."

"Me? Different? I'm fine," he insisted, forcing a smile.

"When you first came in, I thought something was wrong. I mean, it seemed that you were trying to sound optimistic because you didn't want to scare me."

"No such thing, Amy. Everything is fine. So far you're having what we like to call an uneventful recovery. Boring, almost." He laughed, hoping to entice her to laugh. But she did not.

It shows, he thought as he withdrew from the room. My mind is not with my patients. It's up there with Simmie and Coleman and what he'll find.

EMILY Duncan had surrendered her young daughter to Sy Rosen. He led the child into the treatment room and held her to reassure her while Dr. Coleman administered a local anesthetic to her arm.

Once the anesthetic took effect, Sy turned the child's face toward his own as Coleman picked up a long, sterile stainless steel needle. He inserted it into the skin of her arm, pressed the needle until he could feel it pierce the bone and sink into the soft area of her marrow. He excised a few drops, placed some on a glass slide and deposited the rest in a test tube along with heparin to keep it from clotting. Coleman repeated the process four times in different parts of her body.

The procedure was carried out without pain to the patient and with a minimum of fear. Sy returned her to her mother.

"Take her home—" he started to say.

"What did you find?" Emily interrupted quickly.

"Nothing yet," Sy said. "You can even take her to school."

"I'll take her home," Emily said. She grasped little Simone's hand and started out, but stopped to look back at Sy with a plea in her eyes: Don't find anything.

By the time Sy returned to the treatment room, Coleman was viewing the samples on the slides under the microscope.

"Well?" Sy asked.

"Take a look," his colleague urged.

Sy studied the slides carefully, one after another. When he raised his head from the microscope, he stared at Coleman. It was obvious they had both reached the same discouraging diagnosis.

"We—we can't be too hasty about this. Let's submit the samples to electron microscopy," Sy said.

Coleman knew it would not reverse the diagnosis. But he agreed. "Sure, Sy. Right away. I'll call you with the results."

WALT tried to continue with his rounds. But he could not. He was approaching a patient in room 517 when he suddenly turned to the elevator. He rode to the main floor, exited the elevator and started down a long corridor of doctors' offices.

He entered the office with the bronze plaque reading DR. SIMON ROSEN. "Is he free?" he asked Bridget, Sy's secretary.

She could tell by the look on his face that it would do no good to say that he wasn't. Walt continued on into Sy's private office, where he found him studying the file of his next patient.

"Sy?" Walt asked anxiously.

The elderly man looked up, dropped the file to his desk and knew that the moment had come to speak some distressing truths to a man on whom he looked as a son. "Walt, sit down."

It was hardly necessary for Sy to say anything else. Walt knew that the diagnosis was among the worst and the prognosis could not be much better.

"Walter, we have to await confirmation from the path lab. But if I had to render a curbstone opinion, I would say acute myelocytic leukemia."

Walt was aware of the sweat forming on his brow, his cheeks and his neck. His hands went cold.

"It's not the end of the world, Walt. Leukemias are amenable to treatment. Vincristine, asparaginase, prednisone in heavy doses. We can have that thing on the run in weeks."

Walter Duncan nodded in a vague manner that was meant to end the discussion. He rose. "I've got a patient waiting" was all he said, and he left.

THE next morning, while Sy Rosen was studying a set of X rays in his darkened consultation room, his phone rang. He was annoyed at the interruption and hoped it was not James Rowe Russell, calling to discuss the large verdict that the jury had rendered in the Enright malpractice case. Sy answered with impatient gruffness. "Yes?"

"Sy?" the tentative voice of Emily Duncan asked. "Sy, I have to talk . . ." She could not finish, and began to weep.

The elderly man waited until she recovered. "Emily, my dear, what can I do?"

"I have to see you. Alone. Away from the hospital."

"Of course. Let me take a look at my diary." His finger raced down the entries. "This afternoon at two?" he suggested.

"At two . . ." Emily considered. "Yes. Simmie will still be in school then. Do you know the tearoom just outside the mall?"

"I know the place. I'll be there," he promised.

THEY found a table in a corner and ordered quickly to be rid of the waitress. Emily kept herself in restraint until they were served and alone again. But Sy could detect her deep nervousness.

"Emily, dear, exactly what do you want to know?"

She appeared relieved not to have to initiate the conversation.

"I—I went to the library yesterday," she began.

"And what did you discover there?" Sy asked.

"First of all, there are two kinds of acute leukemia."

"True."

"And one is much worse than the other. The worse of the two is called acute myelocytic leukemia. AML the books kept referring to," Emily said.

"Right," Sy agreed, awaiting the next question with considerable trepidation.

"The kind that Simmie has—is it AML?"

Sy paused before answering. For if Emily was asking, there was every indication that to spare her the worst news at once, Walt had hedged on the specific diagnosis. But if she was asking so direct a question, Sy was compelled to give her a direct answer.

"Yes, my dear. Simmie's *is* a case of AML," the old man said. "I hope you can understand Walt for being considerate of your feelings, for giving you time to adjust."

She nodded. Tears began to seep from her eyes. She wept silently. Embarrassed, she used her napkin to dry her cheeks.

"Tell me," she finally said. "Tell me everything. Because I have to know how to behave toward my child. I'll promise her anything. I'll lie if I have to. But I myself have to know the truth."

"Emily," the old doctor said, reaching across the table for her hand. "Lying might not be the way."

"I don't want her to suffer emotionally as well. I have to be able to tell her that treatment can help."

"You can tell her that without lying. We can't be sure, but the treatment may help. So until it appears to fail, you can truthfully say it can help. As for the discomfort of the treatment, there is no purpose to lying. It's much better if you tell Simmie about all the difficulties she will face and then say, 'But Mommy will be with you all the time. We'll see it through together.' "

She nodded slightly, accepting the old doctor's counsel, then said, "I want to know what it will be like. I have to prepare myself as well as my child."

"As you wish," Sy Rosen said. "Years ago—twenty-five, thirty—a child like Simmie with AML would last, at best, three months. But in the years since then, we have made great strides. We can induce remission in about seventy percent of AML cases, wipe out leukemia cells, restore normal bone marrow function. Unfortunately, the difficulty in AML cases is that most patients with that form of the disease, after remission, eventually relapse."

"Most patients," she repeated breathlessly.

"We're trying new forms of chemotherapy. And there is always the possibility of bone marrow transplants."

"If that's what it takes, I can give her some of my bone marrow."

"We're getting ahead of ourselves," Sy said. "Let's see how things develop."

"Is there anything else I should know?" she asked.

"Yes. Percentages, remission rates, cure rates mean nothing. What happens to your daughter is the only thing that counts. And that we have to discover day by day."

She nodded thoughtfully and wiped her eyes again.

"More important, remember to show her smiles, courage, love and, above all, hope. I have seen cases where the doctors have given up but the patient has not, and the patient has outlived some of the doctors. Medicine is still an inexact science."

Emily looked at her watch. "I have to pick Simmie up at school," she said.

They rose from the table. He kissed her on the cheek. He watched her leave. And he prayed for a miracle.

Chapter Eight

THE weekly meeting of the Tumor Board convened at ten o'clock, five days after Amy Bedford's surgery, two days after Simone Duncan's diagnosis.

This evaluation of Amy Bedford's condition and the planning of her future treatment depended on the final pathological evaluation of the bones excised by Walt Duncan during surgery. The board, consisting of a hematologist, an oncologist, a radiologist and a surgeon, in addition to Sy Rosen and Walt Duncan, read the pathologist's report.

It confirmed the original diagnosis. "On microscopic analysis," the report stated, "it was found that almost ninety percent of the tumor cells had been killed by the chemotherapy and that the tumor itself was not close enough to the edge of the excised portion to constitute a danger."

Walter Duncan looked in Rita Bristol's direction. She nodded, saying, "We'll continue with the same regimen of chemo."

The next case to be put before the board was that of the patient Simone Duncan. The results of Victor Ogura's early observations and the bone marrow biopsies led the board to agree that the conventional approach to AML was indicated.

Dr. Bristol suggested heavy dosages of vincristine, asparaginase and prednisone for a period of four weeks. This regimen should induce remission in most leukemia cases. To avoid a swift recurrence of the disease, Simone would later have to receive consolidation therapy, involving a different mix of chemicals, to destroy those cancer cells that had survived the first phase.

After the case of Simone Duncan was discussed, Walter Duncan excused himself suddenly from the meeting. He fled down the corridor. Moments later he heard his name being called.

"Walter, Walt . . ." It was Sy.

The old man caught up with him. "Walt, you can't let it get to you now. We have to give the treatment a chance. It's the least you can do. Don't start acting like a typical parent."

"Sy, I've discovered that I *am* a typical parent. Except for one difference. I know all the things that can go wrong. So forgive me if I act like what I am. A worried father, a terrified father."

To ESTABLISH a warm relationship between doctor and young patient, Walt Duncan brought Rita Bristol to Simmie's room in the pediatric pavilion of the hospital. While Emily stood at the foot of Simmie's bed, Walt made the introductions.

"Simmie, darling, this is Dr. Bristol. She is a very nice woman. And a friend of mine. So you can consider her a friend of yours too. You do what she tells you, and you're going to be fine."

He tried to avoid Emily's eyes as he forced a smile. "We'll leave you two to get acquainted."

Throughout the morning Walt adhered to his rigorous schedule of examinations, consultations, studying X rays and arranging for surgery. All the time he felt as if he were dragging with him an extra burden. It was a shadow, a presence that followed him, clouding his thoughts. When he was conscious of it, he knew it was his daughter, in room 209 in pediatric. With an intravenous drip in her young, slender arm infusing what he hoped would prove lifesaving chemicals into her body.

Twice he found reason to go to the pediatric pavilion, to drop in and see how Simmie was bearing up. Each time he found her in bed, holding her favorite dolls, the inverted IV bottle feeding the chemo into her drop by drop. She seemed in excellent spirits.

Aware of his concern, Simmie tried to reassure him. "It doesn't hurt, Daddy. I hardly know it's there."

"Terrific. That's my girl," he said, kissing her and tousling her dark hair. At the same time he was keeping track of the time. Two more hours, three, and the aftereffects would commence.

Early that afternoon, after his first surgical case and with half an hour before his next scheduled operation, he stripped off his OR greens and hurried back to his daughter's room. He found her in the arms of her mother, retching into a stainless steel basin. He slipped into Emily's place, took his daughter's frail young body in his arms and held her close, as if to impart his strength to her. Her body seemed to relax, but only a little. She breathed more deeply.

"Better, baby? Better?" he asked softly.

She tried to nod, but suddenly another wave of nausea welled up in her. The phone rang. Angrily he said to his wife, "Don't answer the damned thing!"

It continued to ring. Emily lifted the receiver.

"Yes. Yes, he's here. . . . I'll tell him." She hung up. "That was surgery. Your next patient is ready. You have to scrub."

Reluctantly he surrendered his child to her mother. He kissed Simmie on the cheek. "Mommy will be with you, so don't worry, baby. Don't worry."

Two hours later Walt Duncan stood at his daughter's bedside, staring down at the sleeping child. Emily stood beside him.

"Will it happen again?" she asked in a whisper.

"Not till they give her another dose of vincristine," he whispered back. "Poor kid. Exhausted. But at least she can sleep now. You ought to go home and get some rest yourself, hon."

"I'd feel better staying here, in case she wakes."

"All right," he said, understanding. Then he left the room and exhaled wearily, exhausted from the strain of keeping from his wife his direst fears.

He started on his rounds. This was a big day for one of his patients. Amy Bedford would be getting out of bed this afternoon. On her feet. Both of them.

He entered Amy's room, calling as cheerfully as he could, "Okay, lazybones! Today's the day you have to get out of bed."

"Can I?" Amy asked, starting to move.

"Not so fast, my dear. First a little lecture. I wouldn't be Dr. Walt if I didn't precede everything with a lecture, would I?"

He tried to laugh, but Amy noticed that he could not.

Walt presented her with crutches. "These are the old-fashioned kind that fit under your armpits. The reason for that is you are to walk without putting any weight at all on your right leg. So let's get these adjusted. Sit up, Amy."

She moved slowly, carefully, to a sitting position. Then, bringing her legs to the side of the bed, she sat up.

"Easy now, my dear," he coached.

She started to rise as he slipped one crutch under her left arm, then under the right. The crutches were a bit too high. He knelt beside her, loosened the screws of the adjustable slides and set them at the proper height. Then he observed her carefully as she let her body rest on the rubber tops of the crutches.

"Good, very good. Now let's review your new regimen. What we did with the surgery was remove the origin of your cancer. But cancer is a treacherous disease. We can cut it out and there can still be cancer cells floating through your bloodstream. So we have to track them, hunt them down, wipe them out."

"How do we do that?" Amy asked.

"Chemotherapy."

"More chemo?" she asked.

"Yes, more chemo. Not for at least three weeks. Because chemo right now would interfere with your leg healing. But after that, every two or three weeks."

"Every two or three weeks!" she echoed.

"Yes, Amy. For at least eight months," he said. "Remember, I said this would take a year. The next eight months are part of it."

"I was planning on going back to school full time."

"Not now, Amy. Go when you can. But don't even try to take your exams. You're not ready yet."

She nodded, but her eyes became moist.

"And I'll want your lungs x-rayed every month."

"Why?"

"If those darned cells are at work in your body, that's the most likely place for them to show up."

"And if they do?" She hesitated to ask.

"If they do, we cut them out. And continue with the chemo."

"If I'm still alive, that is." She stared at him directly, asking to be contradicted.

"Amy, you've come this far in good style. Don't start feeling sorry for yourself. Not now. Believe me, compared to some cases I know, you're doing extremely well."

"Doctor," she said, then hesitated, wondering if it would be impertinent to ask. She decided to risk it. "Doctor, are you all right today?"

"Of course I am. Why do you ask?"

"When you just said, 'compared to some cases I know,' somehow it seemed strange, the way you said it."

He realized that this teenager was a great deal more perceptive than he had thought. Or else he was more transparent.

"Yes, Amy. You're right. That case I know, she's my daughter."

"Oh?" Then Amy dared to ask, "Is she very bad off?"

"She could be," he admitted.

"Is she here in the hospital?"

"On this floor."

"Would you mind— I mean, is she allowed to have visitors?"

"I think she might welcome that, Amy."

"If it's not too far, that'll be my first walk."

"That would be very nice. But don't overtax yourself. Your muscles aren't going to be as strong as you think. It'll take time. So don't overdo."

"I won't, Doctor. I won't."

ONCE left alone, Amy Bedford reached for the crutches that leaned against the side of her bed. She slipped them into place, thinking, I'll have my walk before Mom and Dad arrive. Then when I do it for them, they'll be surprised. It's time they had a happy surprise.

She rose to her one good foot, rested her full weight on it, made sure her right foot did not touch the ground. She hobbled toward the door and realized it was an awkward process and she had better be very careful.

After just enough steps to take her to the door, she decided not to venture down the hall to visit Dr. Walt's little girl. She was relieved to return to her bed, far more tired than she had expected.

Where, she thought, where is all the energy, all the strength I used to have? Chastened, a bit frightened, she lay back in bed.

In keeping with hospital regimen she was given an early dinner. Afterward she tried to interest herself in a magazine, but her ability to concentrate seemed to have failed her too. It was almost dark outside, one of those late-spring evenings when dusk seemed soft and benign. The automobile traffic sounded far away. The human traffic in the hall was at a lull, just before the invasion of nighttime visitors.

In all her days here in the hospital Amy had become skilled at reading the sound of footsteps. Now she could hear her parents' footsteps approaching—her father's sharp, staccato steps and her mother's, hurrying alongside. Amy raised herself, edged to the side of the bed, sat up, reached for her crutches, fixed them firmly in place under her arms, and rose. She was determined that when they came in, she would be facing them.

As usual, her father preceded her mother into the room. His prepared smile gave way to a look of surprise and delight.

"Amy! You're standing. Marion, look, she's on her feet! Isn't that terrific?"

Unreservedly he crossed the room to his daughter, carefully embraced her and kissed her on the cheek.

"OKAY, Amy, let's see you walk today," Walt Duncan said.

Amy started toward him on her crutches. He watched, trying to detect if even by inadvertence she was putting any weight on her right leg.

"Perfect, Amy. Now we are going to put on a walking leg brace Hans has designed for you. You'll wear that until I evaluate you again five weeks from now."

"Are you telling me I can go home?" Amy asked.

"Yes!" Walt said. "But you have to remember two things we're going to be watching: healing and, even more important, any sign of infection."

"Why are you so worried about infection?" Amy asked. "I won't do anything dangerous."

"Amy, you'll be getting chemo every few weeks. While the chemo is chasing those cancer cells, it is also weakening your immune system. That's why I keep harping on infection," he explained. "Now, I've called your mother. She'll be coming for you this afternoon."

"Then I'd better see Simmie before Mom gets here."

"Simmie told me you were in to see her. Several times. She likes you."

"I like her too," Amy said. "She's very pretty and bright. What's actually wrong with her? No one would say. Except I can tell by their attitude it's serious."

"It is," he admitted. "But we're doing all we can."

"That means it's very serious. Doesn't it?"

"I'm afraid so," said Walt.

Amy Bedford made her way down the corridor on her crutches, which she now handled with confidence. As she reached the open door of Simone Duncan's room she heard, "Mommy, why don't you go down and get some lunch? I'm feeling great."

"I won't leave you alone," her mother was saying as Amy entered the room.

"You won't have to, Mrs. Duncan. I'll stay with Simmie while you're gone."

"See, Mommy, you can go now," the child said encouragingly.

"Well, okay," Emily Duncan said as she bent to kiss Simmie. "I'll be back as soon as I can, darling."

The two young people waited until Emily Duncan was gone.

"I'm glad you're here," Simmie whispered. "I need someone to talk to. Do you mind?"

"No. Go ahead. Talk!"

"I don't think they're telling me the truth."

"Of course they are. Your daddy has told me the truth all along. He's very up front about everything. Good and bad."

"Then maybe your bad isn't as bad as my bad."

"What do you mean?"

"They tell me things. Like what kind of chemo I'm getting. And what to expect it's going to do to me. And for me. But there's one thing they don't tell me."

"What's that?" Amy asked.

"Am I going to die?" Simmie said. "They don't say anything about that. So I keep wondering. Did you wonder about that too?"

"That. And worse. Like losing my leg," Amy confided.

"Is that worse than dying?"

"I used to think so," Amy said. "But I do know how you feel. I went through all that. Worrying. At night. When you're alone. No matter how much they visit, and talk, come nighttime, you're alone. And you think of all those things they try so hard not to let you think about."

"I know," Simmie said. "I never tell my mom how I feel about dying. She's cried enough as it is. If I told her, she'd come apart."

There was a knock on the door. Both girls turned. Simmie called out, "Mommy?"

It was the nurse with the IV that would begin the next phase of Simmie's chemotherapy. Amy leaned close to Simmie.

"Don't worry. I know it's awful when all this is going on. Just remember it's always over. Always." On impulse she embraced the younger child. "Your dad's a wonderful man. He wouldn't let anything bad happen to you."

She hobbled out of the room on her crutches.

While Marion Bedford gathered up her daughter's belongings and packed them neatly in the small suitcase, Walt Duncan was issuing instructions. "And after she returns for her fourth course of chemo, we will do a complete bone scan." He turned to Amy. "We take no chances, do we?"

"No, Dr. Walt."

"Now, Amy, remember. Don't push things. Healing is a slow process. Keep that brace on. Walk carefully."

Mrs. Bedford had closed the suitcase. It was time to go.

"I'll remember, Doctor," said Amy. "And thanks, thanks a million." Impulsively she kissed him on the cheek, but in so doing, lost control of one crutch and fell against him. He caught her.

"Amy, that's what I mean. Don't make any sudden moves. Slow. And sure. That's your prescription for now."

"I know. I'm sorry. I just had to thank you."

There was a knock on the open door. They turned. Brent Martin was standing in the doorway. "Can't I help in some way?" he asked. "Carry your bag or your flowers?"

"Brent, how nice of you to come," Mrs. Bedford said.

"I just thought you might need a hand."

Walt watched with considerable satisfaction as Amy moved out on her own power. Brent and her mother followed. None of them were as aware as Walt how much a part luck had played in bringing Amy Bedford this far. Only he knew how many times along the way her treatment, his surgery could have been frustrated by an unwelcome, even fatal development. And such devastating possibilities must still be reckoned with, he knew.

MARION Bedford turned her silver Cadillac Seville into their driveway and stopped near the front door. Brent was close behind on his motorbike, so when Amy opened the car door, he was there to help her with her crutches and assist her along the brick walk to the house.

When they got to the front door, Amy was breathless from exertion. Brent reached for the shiny brass door handle. He pressed down; the latch gave easily. He pushed the door open for her and stepped back. Amy hobbled in.

She had managed only four labored steps into the foyer when she was surrounded by the excited voices of her classmates. "Welcome home, Amy!" From the living room on her right and from the dining room on her left they rushed out to greet her.

Not only Amy but her mother was taken aback. After the first moment of surprise they looked at each other and both of them began to laugh and cry.

"This is just wonderful," Marion Bedford called out. "But shouldn't you be in school at this hour?"

"We are," one of the girls said. "It's all been arranged. This is a class in social studies. On how to be a good neighbor and friend."

"Well, in that case, I'd better order in some food, lots of food, to judge from the size of this group."

"Too late," another girl called out.

"It's already been done," Brent explained. "We had to get your husband's permission to get in. When he found out why, he just took care of everything."

Chapter Nine

SIMMIE had had her fourth series of chemo and was back in the hospital for what had become routine tests. The test results were not encouraging. Oncologist Bristol decided that stronger chemicals must be administered while the patient was still able to tolerate the effects. As soon as possible, she would put little Simmie Duncan on Adriamycin.

When she announced her decision, Walt detected that she was being slightly less than totally frank about her fears. It was his job now to play the same sad game with Emily.

SIMMIE had been put to bed upstairs. They were in the den when Walt said, "I had another talk with Bristol today."

"What did the Iceberg have to say?" Emily asked, anticipating bad news.

Walt tried to laugh. "I thought only patients called her that."

"She's a machine. A computer. Such and such results from the lab, and she grinds out those chemicals like a coin machine."

"Emily, that woman deals with the worst illnesses there are. If she became emotionally involved in each case, she'd go completely to pieces."

Walt took his wife gently by the shoulders, held her close and kissed her. While still in his embrace, Emily asked, "What did Bristol have to say?"

"She wants Simmie back in the hospital. This time to stay."

"Stay?" Emily asked. "What for?"

"A new kind of chemo. Very strong. Bristol thinks it might do the job this time."

"She used those words, 'to stay'?" Emily asked.

"For the course of the chemo. It's a protective measure. Em, darling, you're trembling. What's got into you?"

"I don't know," she admitted, breaking free of him so she could wipe away her tears. "Those words, 'to stay,' made it seem as if she was never coming home again."

"Bristol's doing all she can. We're all doing all we can. But there are no guarantees," he said.

She nodded. "When does she want her there?"

"Tomorrow."

THE next morning Emily Duncan brought her daughter back to the pediatric pavilion. She carried a suitcase with Simmie's nightclothes, robe and slippers. And Matilda, her favorite doll.

As they stepped into the elevator they discovered Mrs. Amiel, a young, rather pretty blonde. Her son had occupied a room adjacent to Simmie's during her previous hospitalization.

"Good morning," Emily said. "How's David doing?"

Inhibited by Simmie's presence, Mrs. Amiel said, "Oh, fine. He's getting along just—just fine."

"I'm glad," Emily said.

But over Simmie's head the two mothers exchanged glances. Mrs. Amiel's eyes betrayed her hopelessness. Still, she tried to smile. Emily thought, She was so pretty two months ago; now she's aged not months but years. Am I looking at myself a few months from now?

The elevator door opened. The women parted quickly, Mrs. Amiel hurrying down the corridor to see her young son.

"He's very sick, isn't he, Mom?" Simmie asked.

"Yes, dear."

"Then why did she say he was doing fine?"

"Just—just trying to keep up her own hopes, I guess."

They were passing an open door when they heard a familiar voice. "Simmie, that you?"

Simmie went to the open door, peered in to discover Amy Bedford in bed, an IV in her arm.

"Amy!" Simmie was delighted to see her.

"Yes. I'm back for mine. You too?"

"I guess so," Simmie said.

"Well, I've got only four months to go," Amy said. "Look, when they get this IV out of me, I'll come visit. Okay?"

"Oh, sure!" Simmie said. "Please!"

THE NEXT DAY AMY BEDFORD was given a complete bone scan. After it was over, she was free to go to the solarium, catch up on school assignments, or visit. She chose to visit.

The little Amiel boy was still here. She always looked in on him when she came back for chemo. But when she reached his door, it was closed and there was a sign, NO VISITORS. She hesitated, then turned and started down the hall on her cane. Her progress in that regard had pleased Dr. Duncan. She was now permitted to rest twenty-five percent of her weight on her right leg while wearing a brace and using the cane for support.

She made her way down the corridor with great care to Simmie's room. The door was open. Amy looked in. Simmie was in bed, her doll clutched in her arms. Amy watched for a moment and realized that the child was asleep. She decided to go in.

She stood at the foot of the bed, leaning forward to get a closer look at Simmie. She was pretty, Amy thought. Dark-haired and with small, exact features, like her mother's. When she grew up, she would look like her mother. Yes, if she grew up. If?

Amy wondered, Why am I thinking something like that suddenly? Is it because of the way she looks? So thin, so pale, and her cheeks so sunken. She wasn't like that the first time I saw her. But then neither was I before they started me on the chemo. She'll get over it. As I did. And maybe they'll get her a wig, like I have now. Do they have wigs for kids so young?

The nurse wheeled an electrocardiograph machine into the room. She smiled at Amy and was about to speak, but the older girl signaled that Simmie was still asleep.

Amy turned on her cane and started out of the room, glancing at the medical equipment and thinking, I never need anything like that when I'm getting chemo. I wonder what's wrong.

EMILY Duncan had dressed hurriedly and was on her way to the garage when the phone rang. For an instant she considered refusing to answer. But it might be the hospital.

"Hello."

"Emily, dear." She recognized her mother's voice. "Emmie, Dad and I have been talking it over, and we feel we should be there—" her mother began.

"Mother, please. I don't think it's wise. Walt doesn't think so either. Not with Dad's heart condition. So you just stay out there in Arizona until we send for you."

"And when will that be?" her mother asked. "When it's too late?"

"Don't say that!" Emily rebuked her mother.

"Well, what are we to think? The only reports you give us are so vague. And there's no real sign she's getting better. We think we should come," her mother insisted.

"No!" Emily said bluntly. "I have to spend all my time with Simmie. So, much as I love you, I cannot run a household for you and Dad. I have time for only one thing now, my daughter!"

"Are you forbidding us to come?" her mother asked, her hurt obvious in her strained voice.

"If you want to put it that way, Mother. Yes, I am forbidding you. Now I have to go to the hospital. I'll call you later."

The conversation with her mother had unnerved her. On her way to the hospital Emily had to make an effort to drive carefully. By the time she arrived, she felt under control. Sufficiently so to acknowledge that her mother's love for Simmie, her dad's love for his granddaughter were no less than her own. She must try to be more pleasant and understanding.

Her sense of control was severely shaken by what confronted her as she entered Simmie's room. The child lay on her back, an IV in her arm. Fixed to her chest were the sensors that Emily identified immediately as necessary for an electrocardiogram. Sy Rosen was leaning over her bed.

Oh, no, Emily thought, terrified. Has her heart given out?

Whatever self-control she had been able to muster deserted her now. "Sy?" she asked through her tears.

He gestured her to go out into the corridor. Once the door was closed, she asked, "What happened?"

"Nothing. That equipment is to prevent anything *from* happening," he explained.

"They're doing an electrocardiogram. That means a heart attack."

"Emily, please, before you start imagining the worst, let me explain. Dr. Bristol is now using a more powerful drug on Simmie. Adriamycin. Which sometimes produces side effects. Tachycardia. Very rapid pulse. Skipped beats. And other heart complications. So while they administer the drug, they also monitor her heart to make sure none of those things occur."

"And if they do occur?" Emily demanded.

"She stops the treatment at once," the surgeon said. When Emily did not respond, he said, "You believe me, don't you?"

She finally nodded. "I'm sorry, Sy. But I just had a run-in with my mother on the phone, and I guess it undid me."

"She wants to come, eh?"

"Yes. What do you think?"

"I'm the wrong one to ask. Frankly, if you and Walt had moved out to California when he had that offer from U.C.L.A., and Simmie was this sick, I'd come. Whether you said to or not. So I know how grandparents feel." He smiled. "Not much help, am I?"

She kissed him on his wrinkled cheek. "I'll call Mother back."

"Good. After all, your daughter needs you now. But you are also a daughter. So there's no shame in needing your mother."

Two months later Amy Bedford returned to the hospital for another series of chemo. Another X ray. She knew the routine well by now and figured there were only three X rays to go, two more scans, possibly three, and eight more series of chemo.

A year before, she had been a healthy, strong young woman whose sole aim in life was winning the state tennis championship. Now she was an emaciated, almost bald young woman who was lucky just to be alive.

But she *was* alive. And determined to stay that way. Not only for herself, but for her mother, who was so devoted, and especially for her father. Lately he had revealed depths of feeling that she had never suspected, finding the time to call and visit her every day she was in the hospital.

Amy made her way down the corridor to the room assigned to her. She still depended on her cane. But only until she had progressed sufficiently in her new physical therapy program to build up her hip and leg muscles.

It was early. Very early. The carts were still in the corridor, ready to receive empty breakfast trays. Amy looked for her room and noticed that she had just passed a door with a name card reading SIMONE DUNCAN. So little Simmie was still here. Strange. The last time she had asked Dr. Walt about his daughter he had said, "Oh, she's coming along. Coming along."

BEHIND her closed door Simmie Duncan lay in bed, clutching her doll Matilda, waiting for her mother to arrive. The nurse had been in to take her breakfast tray and remind her cheerfully, "No chemo today, sweetheart. Isn't that good news?" Simmie had tried to laugh, but the muscles of her stomach ached too much from three days of nausea and vomiting.

Some day soon, she thought, I'll be going home, and then all this will stop. The needles. And the doctors. So many doctors. The way they smile at me, they must think I'm a dummy. And Uncle Sy. Even when he smiles, his eyes tell me how serious it is.

Outside the door she could now hear the usual morning noises: the wheeled carrier that rolled softly from door to door collecting the empty breakfast trays, the scurrying rubber-soled footsteps of the nurses.

Suddenly she heard the sounds change. Footsteps seemed to stop; then they all moved rapidly in the same direction. There was tense whispering, which made Simmie sit up and lean in the direction of the door, straining to listen.

There were other sounds now. She recognized the voice of the floor supervisor as she said, "We'll get the certificate filled out later. Meantime, move him off this floor."

Curious, and free of the confining IV and the electronic sensors, Simmie Duncan slipped out of bed. She went to the door to peer out into the corridor. She heard sounds once more. Voices. Footsteps. Then she saw a rubber-wheeled gurney pushed by a young student nurse. On the gurney, completely covered by a white sheet, was the form of a child.

Through wide, frightened eyes Simmie watched until they passed out of sight. She felt cold suddenly. She began to tremble. She turned back to her bed, crept in between the warm sheets and reached for Matilda. She held the doll close again and lay still until she pulled the covers up over her head.

When Emily Duncan came in for her usual morning visit, she found her daughter covered that way.

"Honey, what are you doing?"

"Just playing games with Matilda."

"Come out. Let me see how you look this morning." Simmie wriggled up out of her hiding place and smiled.

"That's my baby," Emily said, but she could read fear in the child's eyes. "Honey, what is it? Something wrong?"

"No, I'm fine, Mommy. Honest. Just . . ."

"Just what, darling?"

"Can I go home?" Simmie burst out.

"Home?" Emily repeated. The question caught her by surprise. "That depends on what Dr. Bristol says."

"What if she says I can *never* go home?" Simmie asked.

"Why would she say that?"

"Because maybe they'll always find new things to do to me."

Emily sat on the side of the bed, took her child in her arms and brushed back her thinning dark hair. "Simmie, darling, the doctors are trying new things because that's the way they'll discover the right thing that will cure you."

"They don't cure everybody," Simmie said.

Emily felt her own body stiffen. "No, darling, the doctors can't cure everybody. But when they find the right thing, they will cure you."

Just after lunch, once Simmie had fallen asleep, Emily went to the nurses' station. There she discovered that early that morning young David Amiel had died of his lung disease. That sweet, gentle little boy, not yet nine years old. Of one thing she was sure. When Simmie woke, she would have to talk to her about it. She would not allow her to go on concealing her fears.

SIMMIE moved in her sleep, then opened her eyes. "Mommy?" she asked, to make sure.

"Yes, baby, I'm here. Would you like a drink?"

"No, thank you," Simmie replied.

The child lay still, then started humming to her doll.

"Simmie, did something unusual happen early this morning?"

"Early this morning, something— Oh, yes. Someone, some child must have died."

"How do you know?"

"I heard sounds. So I got out of bed. I went to the door. I peeked out. And I saw this stretcher. There was a . . . there was someone small, covered by a sheet."

"You know Mrs. Amiel?"

"Oh, yes. She's a very nice woman. Was it . . ."

"Yes, Simmie. It was her son, David."

A look of fear slowly darkened Simmie's pale, thin face. But she said nothing.

"Simmie, when you saw that, did it frighten you?"

"Uh-huh," she said very softly.

"Is that why you were hiding under the covers?" Emily asked.

"I wasn't hiding," Simmie said. "I was—I was trying to see how it felt."

"How what felt, darling?"

"How it felt to be lying on that stretcher all covered up. Dead."

Emily fought hard to control her impulse to embrace the child. She knew that any overemotional reaction from her would only serve to frighten Simmie even more.

"Mommy, how *does* it feel?"

"I don't know exactly how it feels. But I know one thing. There is no pain."

The child thought a moment, then nodded and seemed reassured.

"It's nothing to be afraid of, Simmie. Because it is something that is going to happen to all of us one day. It's as much a part of living as being born.

"You know, soon after you were born, Uncle Sy held you when you were christened. And he gave you that gold bracelet that we're keeping for when you grow up. When he brought it to the house, he said to me, 'Em, I won't be there by the time Simmie gets married. But I would like for her to wear this on her wedding day.' What he meant was that everyone dies at some time. He thought his time would come before you were old enough to get married. And he wanted to be remembered."

"When he said that, was he afraid?"

"No. He wasn't afraid. He seemed like a man who had completed his life's work and was content to die," Emily explained.

"Was he tired, and did he want to rest?"

"Yes, that's one way of saying it, darling."

Chapter Ten

RITA Bristol laid out the data on Sy Rosen's desk.

The old man tugged at his small, tight beard, reluctant to examine the material. Finally he picked up the pages and studied the data. The results were even worse than he had feared.

Poor Simmie, he thought. That innocent, bright child to be faced with a white count so low. And her platelet count even lower. Both counts severely diminished by the chemo, inviting the possibilities not only of infection but of hemorrhage. That's the trouble with chemo. It attacks healthy cells as well as the cancer. The very white cells and platelets relied on to fight disease become victims of the chemo. Yet the diseased cells had not been wiped out.

Sy tossed the pages back onto the desk. "All right, Rita, what are you suggesting?"

Dr. Bristol looked down at the old man, at his watery eyes, which made no secret of his torment. "Extreme cases demand extreme measures. Superlethal doses of radiation and chemo to wipe out all of the malignant cells, and also her own bone marrow. Then infuse healthy donor marrow to reconstitute her body's immunologic systems."

"Total body irradiation," Sy said, indicating his reluctance.

"I'll prescribe prednisone, of course, to counteract any swelling of her brain," Dr. Bristol said.

"You realize, Rita, that Simmie has no siblings."

She nodded.

"Then you also realize the risks," Sy said.

"I never said she was an ideal candidate for a bone marrow transplant. But I know what her chances are now. None. I would like to do histocompatibility tests of Walt and his wife. And use the marrow from whoever is the closer match to Simmie. Of course, I'll take this to the Tumor Board. But first someone should discuss it with Walt Duncan."

"I will talk to Walt at once," Sy said.

Dr. Bristol started to gather up her lab reports, but the old man laid his hand on hers. He said, "You know how bad the odds are."

"In this case there is no treatment of choice."

He nodded. Rita Bristol took her reports and started out of the room. At the door she stopped to remind him, "Of course, once the superlethal doses of radiation and chemo start, I'll have to confine Simmie to reverse isolation."

"Of course."

WALTER Duncan took the news with no show of emotion. Sy almost wished his protégé would break down, cry, curse, or explode in fury at the Fates. But Walt had listened as if receiving reports concerning a stranger.

"I'll speak to Emily" was all he said as he started for the door. Then he turned slowly to face his mentor, and Sy could see the glisten of tears on the younger man's cheeks.

"Emily is no fool. She will know how desperate we are. Only one step away from giving up altogether."

"Walt, would it help if I told her?" Sy asked.

"No. This is something she deserves to hear from me."

THAT evening, after he had seen all his patients and left instructions for his morning surgery, Walt found two messages in his office from James Rowe Russell, the hospital's powerful board chairman. Obviously Russell assumed that Walt was avoiding him, for his second message read, "I will wait in my office until I hear from you." That made it an obligatory call. Walt telephoned Russell's office.

"Oh, Duncan," Russell greeted him, barely able to conceal his hostile attitude.

"You called me, sir. What can I do for you?"

"You can listen to a letter I just received from the hospital's attorneys. 'We have been informed that the verdict of two million dollars against Dr. Enright has been upheld on appeal. Less than an hour ago we were notified by the insurance company that for the forthcoming year malpractice premiums for all hospitals in this district will be increased one hundred and fifty percent.'

"Duncan," Russell went on, "next time you feel the urge to place your ethical duty above common sense, think about this experience. Think twice."

"Sir, are you threatening me?" Walt asked.

"*Advising*, Duncan, *advising*," the man said coldly.

Before Walt could react, Russell hung up on him. There was nothing to do now but pick up Emily and take her home. And tell her about Simmie. And bone marrow transplants.

THEY were halfway home. Nothing had been said. When they stopped for a traffic light at the edge of a shopping center, Walt asked, "Do we need to pick up anything?"

Emily did not answer.

"Em? Darling?" He turned to her, to find her weeping silently. "Em, please . . ." She shook her head, continued to weep, powerless to hold back the tears. He wanted to embrace her, but the light changed to green. He drove on slowly.

"Em, you mustn't give up. There are still things we can do," he said reassuringly. He glanced at her. She was staring straight ahead, her eyes still moist. "In fact, I was going to tell you. We both have to be tested. Tomorrow, if possible. They have to find out which one of us is most histocompatible with Simmie."

He expected her to ask why, but she remained silent.

"You see, there's a procedure called a bone marrow transplant. It's really miraculous the way it works. In leukemia the body's own immune system doesn't produce the proper number of healthy, disease-fighting white cells. The fault is in the bone marrow. So what we can do now is eliminate completely Simmie's faulty bone marrow, using heavy concentrations of chemo and radiation. Then we take bone marrow from a compatible healthy donor, like you or me, and inject it into her intravenously. Eventually the transplant stimulates the growth of new, healthy bone marrow in the patient."

He awaited Emily's reaction. There was none.

"Of course, during the treatment there are some difficulties. When they wipe out Simmie's bone marrow, they also wipe out her body's resistance to disease. So, during that time she has to be in what we call reverse isolation. She will be moved to a small suite with a little anteroom separating her from the outside. There will be facilities where visitors can wash. And sterile gowns to wear. But you can spend just as much time with her as you do now."

They arrived at the house. Walt went into the den to mix himself a light drink. Soon he heard Emily's steps behind him.

"Drink?" he asked.

"Walter," she said, "what does GVHD mean?"

He had to grip the whiskey bottle firmly so as not to drop it. Where had she come upon that term? And if she knew enough to ask what it meant, she must know a good deal more about bone marrow transplants than he had suspected.

"GVHD," he began. "That's graft-versus-host disease."

"What does it *mean?*" she insisted.

"Well, there are transplant cases where instead of achieving the desired result, the graft starts to attack the host—the patient, that is."

"So a transplant could do more harm than good," she said.

"Now, honey, you know that any treatment, even the surgery I do, can sometimes backfire. We do the best we can."

"And when the best is no better than the worst?" she demanded. "What about those times?"

He knew now that he had to address her fears directly. "Em, how did you run across GVHD?"

She stared at him, angrily at first; then gradually her anger gave way to tears. "I'll have that drink now." She went to the nearest chair and sank into it. He mixed her drink and brought it to her.

"This afternoon," she said, "after I left Simmie, I was walking down the corridor when I overheard Sy talking to Dr. Bristol in another room. He said, 'Rita, about Simmie. Do you think a bone marrow transplant will do any good?' She said, 'Sy, you know the odds. Even in cases where the match is from an identical sibling, forty to fifty percent develop GVHD.' And Sy said, 'Yes, I know. And once established, GVHD is virtually resistant to treatment.'

"After that I went down to the hospital library. And I asked for the latest information on bone marrow transplants. There are all kinds, I discovered. Transplants from the patient's own marrow when he or she is in remission. Then marrow from an identical twin, or from a partially matched donor. Is that right?"

"Yes, yes, that's right."

"The worst odds, the lowest cure rate, is when they transplant marrow from a partially matched donor."

"It's true that the ideal match would be from an identical twin. But there's only the two of us who have a chance of being histocompatible with Simmie. We're doing the best we can."

"Not exactly, Walter," Emily said.

"There isn't anything else left to try!" he protested.

"That's precisely what I mean. We're at a time when little lies won't do any longer. When being considerate of my feelings won't wash. From now until the end of this I want to know how bad it is. I want to be able to be honest with my daughter. She is very intelligent, very sensitive. Only the other day—" The glass dropped from her hand and fell to the carpet.

"Em—"

"Only the other day she asked me, 'How does it feel to die?' "

"Em!" He went to her, pulled her up from the chair and held her as her body shook from sobbing. "Darling, please."

Through her tears she was able to say, "From now on I've got to know the truth, the whole truth."

"Of course, darling. Everything. But just hold fast to the thought that it isn't hopeless yet. Difficult. Against the odds. But not hopeless. Remember that."

"Will you tell me when it is?" she challenged.

He hesitated only briefly. "Yes, yes, I'll tell you."

ONCE Emily and Walter Duncan had both given samples of their blood and bone marrow, it became clear that Emily's genetic characteristics matched Simmie's more closely than Walter's. Unfortunately, even Emily's was not perfect.

"I've seen closer matches," Victor Ogura said to Sy Rosen and Rita Bristol. "If only there were a sibling."

Simmie Duncan now had to be prepared for the transplant process. It was a debilitating procedure, commencing with intravenous doses of the chemical cyclophosphamide for two consecutive days. Being a very powerful drug, it had the unfortunate and more taxing aftereffects of such drugs. For two days Simmie was racked with even more nausea and vomiting.

After those days of agony were over, there remained six days of superlethal radiation. For the transplanted marrow to have an opportunity to succeed, the patient's body must be almost completely clean of all cancer cells. Since there are areas of the body where the most powerful chemotherapy cannot penetrate, radiation was relied on to accomplish that end. Total body irradiation, TBI, one thousand rads a day of it.

FRAIL little Simone Duncan completed her six days of radiation. On the following day Emily Duncan subjected herself to becoming a bone marrow donor.

Emily lay on her back in a small operating room, a surgical drape covering her body. The anesthesiologist had decided to put her under completely, as much to combat her emotional state as to render her impervious to pain.

Once the patient was anesthetized, Dr. Bristol reached for the sharp-pointed stainless steel instrument that resembled a long hypodermic needle with a flat cap at the top.

The nurse turned Emily on her side, giving Rita Bristol access to her exposed lower back. The doctor then started to push the sharp, hollow instrument into the bone of Emily's pelvic girdle, the area most productive of bone marrow. She pressed with considerable force until she felt the bone give way, and she knew that she was now into the softer, marrow-rich area of the bone.

Having achieved that, Dr. Bristol removed the flat cap from the needle and signaled the nurse for a glass syringe. The doctor screwed it into the top of the inserted needle. Slowly she pulled up the plunger. Soon she had accumulated a hypodermic full of a mix of bloody, serumlike marrow. She emptied it into a sterile test tube and sealed it. Then she repeated the procedure three times.

Several hours later Dr. Bristol infused the marrow intravenously into the arm of Simone Duncan. If nature and luck were with them, Emily's marrow cells would circulate through Simone's bloodstream, eventually to find a home in the marrow cavities of the sick child's bones.

After that it remained to be seen whether her immune system would begin to produce healthy marrow on its own.

EMILY'S parents, Charles and Madeline Ingraham, arrived on the Monday afternoon following the infusion of healthy bone marrow into the frail body of Simone Duncan. Since Emily insisted on remaining at her child's bedside, the Ingrahams took a taxi directly from the airport to the hospital.

Without warning, Emily found herself confronted by her mother and father, who stared at her through the glass window of the small anteroom. It was obvious that they were startled to find their granddaughter in isolation. Emily came out to greet them.

As always, her father moved to embrace her. She moved back.

"Be careful, Dad. This gown has to remain sterile."

"Yes, sure," he said, but it was clear he felt rejected.

"Em, why sterile gowns?" her mother asked. "What's going on here? And why weren't we told?"

"Mother, please! I can't take time to explain now. But if you want to see Simmie, you'll have to do the same. Wash your hands thoroughly. Put on one of these gowns."

They washed with care, then slipped into green sterile gowns. They waited in the doorway until Emily said, "Simmie, darling, guess who came all the way from Arizona to see you?"

"Grandma, Grandpa," the child said weakly.

"Right, Simmie," her grandmother said, drawing close to the bed. She half turned to Emily, asking permission to embrace her grandchild. Emily nodded. Madeline Ingraham gathered the child up in her arms. "Oh, Simmie, how good it is to see you again. Oh, child—" Her reserve deserted her. Shocked by the sight of her granddaughter, the poor woman broke into tears.

Emily was sympathetic, but to protect her child, she ordered, "Dad, take her out of here!"

"Maddy, come." He put his arm around his wife and guided her out of the room.

Emily knelt at the bedside. "Grandmother's so glad to see you, Simmie, that she just broke down and cried. But just think, they came a thousand miles to see you."

The child stared at her through eyes sunk deep into her painfully thin face. "Do I really look so bad?"

"Of course not, baby," Emily said, quick to reassure her. "It's just that the last treatment hasn't had time to take effect. You have to understand how Grandma feels. Being so far away and worrying about you, it was such a relief to see you that she broke down."

"She'll come back, won't she?"

"Of course. Just give her time to gather herself together."
"And Grandpa too," the child said.
"Both of them," Emily promised.

SHE found them in the visitors' waiting room. In one corner Charles Ingraham hovered over his wife, who sat facing away from the other visitors, hiding her tears in her handkerchief.

"Maddy, Maddy," he pleaded.

"I can't help it." She continued shaking her head and crying.

Emily drew close to them. Her father looked to her. He moved aside. Emily placed her hands on her mother's shoulders and turned her about.

"Mother, listen to me." Her mother stared up into her eyes. "You are going back in there. You will smile. And you will talk to Simone of pleasant things. I don't want her to see how startled and frightened you are. Walt and I don't do that. And we won't let you do it."

"But the way she looks. It's plain to see—"

"Plain to see *what?*" Emily demanded angrily.

Madeline Ingraham glanced at her husband, then turned back to her daughter. "She's going to die."

"This last treatment hasn't had time to work yet," Emily insisted. "It'll take weeks, several more weeks, before we know."

"Maddy," her husband said, "do as she says. Wash all signs of crying from your face and go back into that room. Visit with Simmie like you used to when she was little. But do not let her see fear. I'll be along in a minute."

The woman appeared to resist, but then, as she usually did, she yielded to her husband's judgment. Once she had left the room, he took his daughter by the hand and looked into her eyes.

"Now you tell me, Em. Is it as bad as it looks?"

She tried to nod.

"Is it true that this last treatment hasn't started to work yet?"

"It'll take a few more weeks before we know."

"Then I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to take your mother home. Back to Arizona. You've got a tough enough job as it is. You don't need to keep pretending for our sakes as well."

"Thanks, Dad. For understanding," she said.

"Look, darlin', your ma's worried—desperate, in fact. We both are. She'd do anything to save that child. Don't forget, Simmie's as much part of us as you are. Now, I'll do my best to keep your mother in hand. But don't think I feel different than she does."

Emily reached up, drew his face down to hers, kissed him.

"I know, Dad. I know. We each have to see this through in our own way. But stay a day or two longer."

"Okay, baby. You can depend on me."

"Thanks, Dad."

THREE weeks had passed since the injection of Emily's transplanted bone marrow into Simmie. Early each morning Emily had appeared at the hospital and spent the day with her ailing daughter. Each day she watched, expecting some change, some miraculous change. She found none.

Most days she held her retching child while Simone suffered reactions to the methotrexate that she had to endure to help her body deal with the foreign bone marrow. At the same time, Emily, along with Walter and Sy, kept searching for warnings of the graft-versus-host disease they all dreaded.

Despite the discouraging statistics, which Walter no longer attempted to keep from her, Emily kept hoping, seeking signs of improvement. Even during the first two weeks, when she had been told there could be no visible change, she had insisted she detected signs of recovery.

Several times each day Walt hurried in, scrubbed, gowned himself and visited with his daughter. He embraced her, talked to her, told her funny stories about his own childhood and made her laugh. But all the while he held her, he felt her body growing lighter, her skin barely covering her fragile skeletal structure.

Sy Rosen came by often to smile at his namesake and encourage her, to nod reassuringly to Emily. And he saved all his suggestions for Dr. Bristol. Each day he cornered her in her office.

"Well, Rita. What?" he asked simply.

"We don't know yet," she would say.

"Don't know or don't want to say?" Sy retorted. "Is her system beginning to respond, to produce healthy cells?"

"The signs are not encouraging, Sy."

"And GVHD? Any indication?" Sy asked.

"Not yet."

"If you think it will occur, why not switch from methotrexate to cyclosporine? Or prednisone?" he urged. "They're both effective in preventing GVHD."

"*Sometimes* effective," she corrected.

Sy nodded, accepting her modest rebuke. "Rita, please let me know. If there's anything I can do . . ." The old man had run out of words. Nothing he could say would influence the outcome.

ON THE twenty-sixth day after Simone Duncan had received Emily's transplanted bone marrow, nurse Corinne Scammon took Simmie's temperature as part of the usual morning routine. Scammon glanced at the reading and stopped suddenly.

She held the thermometer up to the light: 101.2. Since Emily stood at the foot of her daughter's bed, Scammon said nothing, shook down the instrument and placed it back in the alcohol.

She went directly to the floor phone and paged Dr. Bristol. The doctor did not answer at once. But within the hour she came up to the pediatric floor to search out the nurse, who was now engaged in inserting an IV into the arm of Amy Bedford. Amy was back for her routine chemo treatment and her monthly lung X ray.

Dr. Bristol came into the room. "You called me, Scammon?"

"The patient in two twelve."

"Yes?" Dr. Bristol asked urgently.

"One oh one point two," Scammon said.

"Thanks. I'll have a look." Rita Bristol hurried away.

"Miss Scammon," Amy said. "The patient in two twelve, isn't that Dr. Duncan's little girl?"

"Yes."

"Maybe I'll drop in later if I'm able."

"I wouldn't drop in. Not today," the nurse said.

"Oh, I know all about scrubbing and wearing a gown—"

Scammon interrupted. "I wouldn't. Not today."

A SHORT time later Sy Rosen sat back in his old creaky desk chair. He tugged at his beard as he stared across the desk, hesitant to ask, "Okay, Rita. What?"

"She has a fever of one oh one point two."

"Any other signs?"

"Indications of exfoliative dermatitis on her back, slight abdominal distension with sensitivity."

"Any signs of hepatitis?" Sy asked.

"Not yet," she said. "But there is further weight loss."

Sy Rosen nodded sadly. "The classic signs. GVHD. Shall we increase the methotrexate?"

"I'm giving her all she can tolerate now."

He nodded, accepting her appraisal of the situation. "Rita, if you had to say, what would you estimate are the chances of reversing GVHD in Simmie's case?"

"Based on my experience, between very bad and none at all."

"Then you consider her terminal?" Sy asked.

"The slightest infection, a hemorrhage—anything could do it."

After Rita Bristol left, Sy Rosen put in a call to Walter Duncan. He was told that Dr. Duncan was in consultation and had left orders not to be interrupted. Later, Sy thought. With what I have to say, later will be good enough. Soon enough.

WALTER Duncan had been summoned down to radiology by Dr. Wiswell, who was in charge of Amy Bedford's X rays and scans. For comparative purposes Wiswell had mounted on the wall of glass all the sets of Amy's X rays.

"Walt, take a look" was all Wiswell said when Walt arrived.

The radiologist turned off the overhead lights, flipped on the back lights. Both doctors moved slowly down the line of films.

Clean, clean, clean, Walter noted silently. Until he came to Amy's most recent set of X rays. There Wiswell had circled a shadow that did not appear on any previous films.

"Damn it!" Walt said. "She was doing so well."

"Fortunately, it's encapsulated."

"Fortunately?" Walter Duncan shot back angrily. "What's so fortunate about having a metastasis? I thought we had this thing beaten! But it never ends."

Walt realized that Wiswell was staring at him. He became self-conscious. "Sorry. I just wasn't expecting this. I'll talk to Levin in thoracic surgery. And, of course, to Amy and her folks."

ED AND MARION BEDFORD HAD both arrived at the hospital within half an hour of Duncan's call; she from home, he from an important meeting at his office.

They waited anxiously in Amy's room for Walt's arrival.

"Has Duncan said anything to you?" Ed asked his daughter.

"Only that he wants to speak to us all together."

"Probably some new kind of treatment," her father said. "Maybe to help you with your physical therapy."

He smiled confidently. Nevertheless, he kept mopping his face with a handkerchief that was already limp. The air in the room grew dense with unspoken fears.

Finally Walt Duncan entered. "Sorry to keep you waiting. But I had things to do down the corridor. Mr. Bedford, Mrs. Bedford, Amy, what I have to say will sound discouraging at first—"

"Doctor, what is it?" Amy asked anxiously.

"Amy, we have discovered something in your last X rays. A spot. Metastasis."

"You're saying she still has the cancer?" Ed Bedford looked as if he had been betrayed.

"Mr. Bedford, I am saying that, as in many similar cases, the cancer has spread to her lungs. That is not so serious as it sounds. Because this particular kind of cancer when it hits the lungs is encapsulated, and we can just cut it out, leaving the lung intact."

"What if the disease is still there—" Ed Bedford started to say.

"That's why we do chemo for a whole year," Walt explained. "To chase down those cells and wipe them out."

"But you didn't wipe them out!" Bedford said accusingly. He started to mop his face again. "You don't know how it feels to be the father of a sick child. Helpless, that's what it feels like."

"I think I know the feeling, Mr. Bedford." Walt turned to Amy. "Now, Amy, we are going to have to operate again. This time I'm asking Dr. Alvin Levin to do it. He's an excellent thoracic surgeon. He's done many cases like this. I will scrub with him and I will be there all the time. The main thing is, Amy, don't think that this is an unusual development. We hope against it. But we do anticipate it. And the odds are in your favor."

Walt took her hand. "Amy, you've been a real trouper through all of this. So I want you to know the truth. Patients with one metastasis in the lung, and no other involvement, have a seventy percent chance of surviving. Living five years and beyond for a totally normal life. Seventy percent. Those are darn good odds."

Amy nodded soberly.

"So you have to go with us the rest of the way. Surgery. Chemo—a new one we call cis-platinum. With your courage and determination you can make it."

Amy stared into his eyes and nodded. "Okay, Dr. Walt."

"Good. Because Dr. Levin has an opening in his schedule tomorrow morning. We should do this at once."

He patted her on the cheek and had started for the door when Bedford called to him, "This Levin, he's the best?"

Walt turned. "If my child could be helped by lung surgery, I'd pick Levin. Does that answer your question, Mr. Bedford?"

Within two hours of Walt Duncan's visit the preparations for Amy Bedford's second surgery were under way. In midafternoon Dr. Alvin Levin came by.

When Levin introduced himself, Ed Bedford, who had remained with Amy for the day, stared at him before shaking his hand. "You're pretty young."

"Beats being just pretty," Levin said, smiling. "Don't worry, Mr. Bedford. I've been briefed on Amy's case. I know what to do. And I do it very well. By this time tomorrow it will be over. Amy will be in intensive care, and we can all breathe easier."

He approached the bed. "Amy, I've had a chance to study your X rays. Based on those, we go in, retract your ribs, reach that sucker and remove it easier than coring an apple. Of course, your parents will have to sign the usual informed consent."

"Will it say anything about—about amputation?" she asked.

"No. This time there's absolutely no possibility of that," Levin promised. "See you in the morning, Amy."

Chapter Eleven

SY KNEW the Duncan family routine these days, knew it only too well. At the end of a long day Walter went straight to Simmie's room, exhausted but determined to greet his young daughter with an optimistic look on his lean, lined face.

By that time Emily had fed Simmie what little she could eat, had tucked her in, sung to her, kissed her and waited until the child drifted off to sleep. She then sat by her bed, holding her cold, wasting hand, observing her shallow breathing.

Walter would arrive, wash carefully, slip into a sterile gown and enter the room silently. Most times his wife would signal him not to talk. He would watch Simmie sleeping, as if he could determine her condition by mere observation.

As the dread illness was sucking the life out of his daughter, so were the demands on his wife draining her. He knew that fatigue, loss of sleep and loss of weight were factors that in combination could bring on nervous exhaustion, even a total breakdown. Emily ate nothing by day. At night, whether they ate at home or went out, every meal ended with the tears she had held back all day.

That evening, knowing the Duncans could be found in Simmie's room, Sy called the nurses' station on the second floor. The nurse came in to say softly, "Dr. Rosen asked if you would stop by before you left. Both of you."

When they arrived at Sy's office, the old man had spread out before him the reports from Dr. Bristol and the lab. He motioned them to take seats. Emily sank into a chair. Walter remained standing.

"Em, Walt, I have conferred with Dr. Bristol. There is no doubt that Simmie is experiencing a GVHD reaction. Bristol has already put her on cyclosporine. But—" He paused, sighed, then said simply, "She has virtually no chance at all. No chance."

"I failed her," Emily said softly, as if to herself.

"Em, no!" Sy refuted.

"I failed her. Whatever it was she needed from my bone marrow, I didn't have it to give."

Walter looked at Sy Rosen, whose face reflected his shock at Emily's reaction. Walter put his arms around her and held her in a tight embrace.

"Em," he said softly. "Em, you didn't fail. Medicine failed. We don't yet know enough to defeat this terrible disease. If anyone's to blame, we doctors are."

He shepherded her out of the office. Sy watched them leave, shaking his head with grim concern.

THEY WERE IN THE HOSPITAL parking lot. Walt was unlocking the car door when Emily suddenly said, "I'm not leaving."

"Em, you've got to get some sleep," he insisted.

"I'll sleep in a chair in her room," she said, starting swiftly back toward the pediatric pavilion.

He raced after her, caught up, seized her. "Em, you can't. You'll disturb her. She needs her sleep too."

"She needs her mother. When doctors fail, when medications fail, a child needs her mother more than ever."

Violently she broke free and ran toward the entrance. He caught up with her at the door. She struggled with him, summoning strength he did not know she possessed. If she was that determined, he knew he had better acquiesce.

"I'll get a cot set up for you," he finally said.

A NIGHT maintenance man found a cot. As quietly as possible Walter set up the cot alongside the child's bed. Simmie stirred, opening her eyes just long enough to ask, "Daddy? That you?"

"Yes, baby. Now go back to sleep."

Once Emily was bedded down, Walt started for home. He got as far as the front door of the hospital but decided to remain. He found one of the small rooms where residents on overnight duty usually slept. He lay down. After all these years, he thought, here I am again, sleeping in the residents' quarters. I remember those days when I used to think ahead, to the future. We'd get married, Em and I. Have children. Have a house. I had it made.

Had it made. That terribly misleading phrase.

Simmie, oh Simmie, what a life I had planned for you. Did you know that I have a fund set up for your college education? Before that, we'd take trips to the most beautiful parts of this country. Then to Europe. I'd take time off. We'd go together. All the things I never had, you were going to have, Simmie. Everything.

Yet, here I am, afraid to go home to an empty house. Afraid that when I get home, I'll race up the stairs to your room to kiss you good night. But you won't be there. I'll go into the den to be with your mother. And she won't be there.

So I am here in this little room. Half my life gone, and I'm back where I was so many years ago. Walter Duncan, who had it made.

THE NEXT MORNING IT TOOK A moment for him to realize where he was. An instant later he recalled he was due in the OR to assist at Amy Bedford's lung surgery. He must shower, have coffee and get to surgery. But first he would stop by Simmie's room.

He entered the anteroom of the isolation suite, prepared to scrub and slip into a sterile gown, but what he heard from inside the room made him pause.

"Simmie, darling, if you could have anything in the world, what would you want?" Emily asked.

"Home, Mommy. I want to go home."

"Home?" Emily equivocated.

"I want my own room again. My own things again. My toys, my books." As if confiding a secret, she added, "I don't like this place, Mommy. I'd rather be home."

"All right, baby. If that's what you want, Mommy will take you home."

Walter's impulse was to blurt out, "No, Emily! You can't do that!" Instead, he remained silent. No purpose in upsetting the child. He would discuss this with Emily later. He slipped into a gown, forced a hearty smile and entered the room.

"Good morning, sweetheart," he greeted his daughter.

"Daddy, guess what? Mommy's taking me home. Won't that be terrific!" She smiled, a bare flicker of a smile, actually.

"Yes, yes, that's fine," he agreed. "Of course we have to talk to Uncle Sy about it first, though."

"Do we?" Emily challenged.

"Yes, Em," he said. "We have to."

"Oh, he'll say yes," Simmie interjected confidently. "He never says no to me about anything."

"We'll see, baby. We'll see," Walter said.

The nurse came in with Simmie's breakfast. It gave Walter a chance to gesture Emily outside the room, where he asked, "Em, how could you promise that? We can't take her home."

"Why not?" she asked sharply.

"Now more than ever she needs medical care."

"Why?" Emily demanded. "What can they do for her now? Nothing. Sy as much as said that last night. Well, she is going home. Where she wants to be. With the things she loves. Where she has lived all her life. Home, Walter, home! To you it's the last place you go. To her it's the first place! It's everything."

"Em—" he started to plead.

"She is going home. Today!" Emily declared with finality.

He could not stop to argue, for he was overdue in surgery. He said only, "Don't do anything until I get back."

"I'll wait that long," Emily said. But she was more determined than he had ever seen her before.

Amy Bedford was sedated but still conscious when Walt entered the operating room in gown, cap and mask.

"Amy," he said, leaning over her.

She looked up and into his eyes. "Hi, Dr. Walt. Last night, before I fell asleep, I was thinking—"

"Yes, Amy?"

"Simmie. How is she?"

"She's getting along, Amy, getting along."

The anesthesiologist spared Walt the obligation of enlarging on the lie when she said, "Doctor, I need access to the patient now."

Walt patted Amy on the cheek. "You'll be okay. When you wake up, that thing will be gone and you'll be good as new."

During the surgery Walt admired Levin's skill. The young chest surgeon handled tissue carefully, yet worked with great efficiency and speed. He removed the cancerous lesion from the lung, dropped it into a stainless steel basin and had it rushed to the lab for a preliminary biopsy to make sure it was not a fresh carcinoma but a metastasis from the original sarcoma.

Ten minutes later the word came over the OR phone. Yes, metastatic osteogenic sarcoma. That meant there was no need for further surgery, and it was safe for Levin to close.

"Sy, it's up to you to talk Emily out of it," Walt insisted. "Talk to her, Sy. She'll listen to you."

"What should I tell her?"

"Tell her she absolutely cannot take Simmie home! We have no facilities at home. Even with twenty-four-hour nursing we can't do anything for her there."

"Walt," the old man said, "we can't do anything for her here."

SIMONE DUNCAN WAS HOME once more, in her own bed, under a bright coverlet of red-and-white floral design. She looked about her and inhaled. "It smells so sweet here, Mommy," she said.

Her mother nodded, smiling, holding back tears.

"It's good to be home." Then Simmie added, "They won't be doing anything to me here, will they?"

"No, darling. Now, would you like something to eat? Some cereal, perhaps?"

"No. Some—some pancakes? With lots of syrup."

"Of course, darling. I'll go down and make them right away," Emily promised. She started for the door.

"Mommy?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Cindy . . ." She pointed to the doll on the top shelf of the bookcase opposite her bed. "You remember, Daddy brought her home for me that time he went to California."

"Of course," Emily said. She reached for the brightly dressed doll with flaxen nylon braids.

Simmie cradled the doll in her arms, straightening its braids.

"Hi, Cindy. Did you miss me?" she asked. "Well, I'll be here from now on."

Emily turned once more to start down to prepare the pancakes. She had not taken two steps out of the room when what she heard arrested her sharply. "Cindy, would you like to belong to Kimmie, or maybe Lynne? You can choose." Emily drew against the wall and out of sight.

"Or should I let Kimmie choose? She's my best friend. We went to day camp together. You'll like her. Maybe what I'll do is give you to Kimmie. And give Oscar the Clown to Lynne. Then there's my ice skates. Who'll I give those to?"

Emily was tempted to rush into the room and protest, No, no, you mustn't! Instead, she leaned against the wall and wept silently as she heard her daughter softly dispose of what she considered her most precious worldly goods.

SIMMIE was dozing when Emily entered her room carrying a tray with hot pancakes.

"Simmie?" Emily said gently to wake her. "Pancakes! The way

I make them on Sunday mornings. Don't they smell great?"

The child ignored her invitation and said, "Mommy, tell me again, how does it feel when you die?"

"Who said anything about dying?"

"Does it hurt?" the child persisted.

Emily realized that for her child's peace of mind the time for pretense was over. She set the tray aside on Simmie's desk and took the child in her arms.

"No, darling, it doesn't hurt. In fact, when it happens, there's no pain at all. All the pain is over."

"Before— Is there pain before?"

"If there is, we'll get Dr. Bristol or Uncle Sy to give you something and you won't hurt anymore."

"Or feel sick in my stomach?"

"No. There'll be no more of that either, sweetheart."

The child lay still, absorbing what her mother had said.

"How does it happen, Mommy?"

Emily found herself unable to answer.

"Will anyone be with me?" the child asked, explaining her question, to Emily's relief.

"Of course, darling. I'll be here. Daddy. Maybe Uncle Sy. One thing is sure, you won't be alone."

"And after? What happens after?"

Emily could not control her tears. She let them roll slowly down her cheeks as she talked.

"After—we'll still be here. You won't be alone."

"Will I ever see you again, Mommy?"

"Sometime, somewhere we will be together again."

"It feels so sad to be away from you for a long time," the child said. "So sad."

She became aware of Emily's tears on her own cheek. "You crying, Mommy?"

"Uh-huh," Emily admitted.

"Is it all right? To cry, I mean?"

"If you feel like it, darling, it's all right to cry."

The child turned to her mother, buried her face between Emily's breasts. Soon Emily felt the warm, moist tears of her young child seep through her dress.

After a time Simmie asked, "Mommy, can Kimmie come to visit? And Lynne? I'd like to give them some things."

"I think it'll be all right. I'll check with Dr. Bristol."

The child seemed reassured. Suddenly she asked, "You're sure I won't be alone, will I, Mommy?"

"No, darling. When it happens, you won't be alone."

FROM that night on, Emily slept alongside her daughter. By the fourth day, once Simmie had been stabilized in her new environment and had her intravenous drip connected to feed her a drug to ease any pain, she was allowed to have visitors.

For a brief time, encouraged by the presence of her two friends, Simmie became animated. She told them of her adventures in the hospital. The treatments. The nurses. Some of the funny things that had happened. And that nice girl, real grown up, who had become her friend—Amy Bedford.

"Did you know she was the tennis champion of the high school? She could even beat some of the guys on the team. She came to see me lots of times."

Emily listened, encouraged by her daughter's sudden spurt of energy. Perhaps in her own environment, surrounded by her friends, she would thrive.

To prevent Simmie's exhausting herself, Emily announced, "Girls, time for cookies and ice cream!"

Neither of them appeared to have the usual eagerness for sweets. Somehow they sensed that this might be the last time they would see their friend. Before they departed, Simone disposed of her possessions as she had planned. Then, gifts in hand, they started to leave.

"Don't go," Simmie pleaded. "What I have isn't catching, is it, Mommy?"

"Of course it isn't catching. But you need to rest now. It's been quite an afternoon, and you need your nap."

After they were gone, Simmie talked on while Emily straightened the covers about her.

"They liked their gifts, didn't they, Mommy?"

"Yes, darling. They loved them. It was very sweet and thoughtful of you to do that."

"After I'm gone, will they remember? I mean every time they look at their presents, will they remember me?"

"With the gifts or without, they'll remember you. We'll all remember you. You will never be forgotten, or alone. You'll be with us always. In our minds. In our hearts."

Reassured, the child closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

As Simmie's condition continued to deteriorate, Walter Duncan came home from the hospital earlier each day. Sy covered for him in consultations and in Tumor Board meetings. On many cases Sy did Walt's postop rounds.

Every moment when he was home and Simmie was awake, Walt spent in her room. He regaled her with stories of his youth, his school days, and of his own parents, who had died years ago.

One night Emily listened to her husband trying to keep up a running recounting of his childhood, which Simmie always called the olden days.

I almost wish he would stop, Emily thought. It's painful to see him try so hard to pretend. Some moments he seems to believe he can reverse the inevitable.

Under the pretext that Simmie needed her rest Emily was able to shoo Walter from the room and to bed for the sleep he too so desperately needed.

On the sixth day of the third week after Simmie's return home, early in the morning while it was still dark, Emily was wakened by her daughter's voice.

"Mommy . . ."

Emily responded sleepily. "Yes, darling? What would you like? Some water? Fruit juice?"

"Mommy, I'm so warm, so wet"—Simmie's voice seemed suddenly muffled—"and I'm so tired."

Emily became alert. With a startled move she reached behind her, found the bedside lamp, flicked it on. Then she saw it.

Blood was seeping from her daughter's mouth, tracing down her chin and onto her nightgown.

"Simmie!" Emily cried out, taking the child in her arms and rocking her. "Walter! Walt!" she called desperately. For she knew. She had read enough to know this was one way it could end. A massive hemorrhage. She began to weep.

"Don't worry, Mommy. I'm all right. It doesn't hurt. It's like you said, it doesn't hurt."

Walt came rushing into Simmie's bedroom. He saw what was happening. He raced to her bedside, tried to take the child from her mother's arms to examine her. But Emily resisted.

"No, no. I promised her. I promised. . . ." She kept protesting and weeping.

Firmly yet gently Walt separated the two. With the child in his arms he realized it had happened. What had threatened for so long had finally happened. He held her, rubbed his large, strong hand across her soft, thin cheek.

The struggle was over. The pain. The agony of the treatments. The battle within her wasted body. It was all over. His child was finally at peace.

Chapter Twelve

THE funeral of Simone Duncan, age eleven, was held on Saturday morning. Several of Simmie's friends and classmates attended, in the company of their parents. Kimmie brought the flaxen-haired doll Simmie had given her. Emily's mother and father were there, having flown in from Tucson.

The ceremony in the church was brief and tasteful. The choral group of her class in school sang two songs. The minister recounted the high points of Simmie's too short life.

Afterward Emily and Walt followed the casket up the aisle of the church toward the bright, sunny day outside. Behind them were Sy and other colleagues from the hospital. As they reached the last row of pews Walter noticed Amy Bedford, leaning on her cane. Next to her was Brent Martin.

At the cemetery there was only Walt, Emily, her parents and Sy. The minister spoke a simple prayer. He turned to Walt, signaled an attendant to hand him the first, symbolic spade of earth. Walt could not bring himself to take it. Again the minister urged it on him. Walt stared down into the grave but did not move.

Sy stepped forward, took the shovel into his own hands and sprayed the fresh brown earth over the casket. Emily's father took the shovel and did the same. Still Walter Duncan did not move.

On the ride back from the cemetery Emily and the Ingrahams sat in the back seat of the limousine. Walt and Sy sat on the folding seats. No one spoke. What was there left to say? Several neighbors were waiting for them when they arrived home. Despite Walt's orders, they had prepared a meal for the mourners, few as they were.

Lunch too was eaten in silence. Walt ate little, excused himself early and drove off.

"Probably gone to the hospital," Sy said. "Maybe it's the best thing for him at a time like this."

Later, out back in Emily's garden, her father conversed with Sy. "Dr. Rosen, was there anything that could have been—"

Sy interrupted. "We did everything. Everything."

After some minutes of silence Ingraham said, "I—I'll have to change my will now."

"Me too," Sy said. Then he asked, "What college did you pick out for her?"

"I was thinking maybe she would have liked Arizona State. Someplace where we could have seen her often. Or even U.C.L.A. That's only an hour's flight from Tucson." They were silent for a long moment before Ingraham asked, "You?"

"I picked out the University of Chicago. For the same reason. It's only an hour's flight from here." Then he added, "I hope you don't mind my thinking I was her grandfather."

"From what Emily's told me, you deserve the privilege. 'Sides, every child is entitled to two grandfathers."

"I'd better go," Sy said. "To do what I can to relieve Walt of his obligations, today of all days."

Sy was on his way to his car when Walt pulled in the driveway. Sy approached him to say one last word of sympathy and noticed that Walt was taking files, books and several framed diplomas out of his car.

"Walter, what's the meaning of this?"

"I don't think I'll be going back there. Emily needs me now. She's been through hell. I've got to make up for it."

"Walter, listen to me—" Sy started to say.

"Sorry, Sy. I've made up my mind. I left instructions about my cases that are still due for surgery. Pendleton will take care of those. If his schedule is overloaded, find someone else."

"Walt, I know how you feel," Sy said. "But—"

Sharply Walt interrupted. "You can do one thing for me. Amy Bedford. I would like you to take on her case yourself."

"Of course. But Walt, that does not address the real issue. You. You have to come back!"

"Why?"

"You owe it to the profession. To your patients. And, in the end, to yourself."

"I owe? I owe no one anything!" Walt exploded. "Simmie! Yes. I owed her. I owed her a lot more than coming home late, when she was already asleep. I owed her a lot more than kisses she never knew I gave her. Well, I have nothing left now except Emily. I owe her all my time, all my love. She needs it. You can see that for yourself."

The ready answer was on Sy's tongue, but he knew it would make no impression on a grieving man as guilt laden and tormented as Walt Duncan was at the moment.

So Sy limited himself to a hand on Walt's shoulder and a soft, "Well, we Jews have a mourning ritual called *shivah*. For a week a man does not leave his home. Does not wear shoes, but slippers. Does not sit on a usual chair, but on a low stool. In the biblical tradition he makes a symbolic cut in his coat, as in the ancient rending of one's garments. But after seven days a man puts aside his mourning and returns to life. He does not forget the dead, whom he prays for. But he resumes his life. I will not mention this again for the next seven days. But after that I must."

"It won't change my mind," Walt insisted.

"I will be back in a week, Walter," Sy said.

BEFORE the week was over Sy called Emily to ask, "Is there anything I can do for you? Is there something you need?"

"Nothing. The neighbors have all been very kind."

"And Walt?" Sy asked.

He heard Emily pause. Then she confessed, "The first two days he greeted visitors. But since then he's been spending his time in Simmie's room. When I ask him to come down, he refuses, saying, 'I'm making up for the time I should have spent here.' Sy, I don't know what to do. I just don't know."

He could hear her gasp and begin to cry.

"Emily, I'll come by and talk to him."

Later Sy Rosen knocked gently on the closed door to Simmie Duncan's room. There was no response. He turned the knob and pushed the door open. The room was in darkness. The blinds were down and shut against the daylight. Sy discovered Walt in a chair beside Simmie's small bed.

"Walt?" Sy challenged.

"Your week isn't over yet" was Walt's response.

"I can't wait," Sy said. "We are having problems at the hospital."

"I'm sorry. Dr. Walter Duncan is no longer available. His time is now his own."

"You have to go back to your work sometime. Why not now?" Sy demanded.

"If I go back—and I say *if*—I will not go back to that hospital. I will never set foot in that place again. I'll take Emily away, somewhere where she can forget all this. It's the least I owe her!"

"Walt—"

His protégé shut him off. "No, Sy. No more do I put aside my needs, my wife's needs, for the sake of others. No more!"

It was night. Walt had not turned on any lights. He had not answered the telephone. He sat in the den, feeling neither hunger nor thirst. Feeling only the stillness in the house. He rose from the chair, went upstairs to look for Emily.

He found her in their bedroom, holding a hanger of clothes. On the luggage rack was an open suitcase.

"Em?"

"I think maybe I want to go away from this place."

"Where?"

"I don't know. My mother's maybe. Someplace. Every time I pass Simmie's room I think, Part of me, the marrow from my bones, attacked her, killed her."

He took the hanger out of her hands, tossed it aside, enfolded her in his arms.

"No, Em, no. That transplant was her only chance, a desperate chance. We all knew that. You did everything you could. Em, we've got only each other now. And I need you very much. Because I too am going to start a new life. If there's going to be any going away, let's go together. There's nothing to keep us here anymore. I'm not going back to the hospital. I told Sy. I may not ever practice surgery again. Or medicine. I owe them nothing!"

He raised her face and kissed her on the lips. He pressed his face against hers.

"Did you mean what you said about not going back to the hospital?" she asked.

"I meant it."

DR. SIMON Rosen had just completed his checkup of Amy Bedford. Her X rays were clean once more. The surgery on her lung had accomplished its purpose, and healing was excellent. "All right now, Amy," he said. "Let's see you walk the length of this room, back and forth, without your cane."

Amy looked at Sy, then at her mother. She rested her cane on the examining table. One foot before the other, she started away from them toward the far wall of the narrow room. The prosthesis within her leg supported her full weight. She was not as smooth as she would be one day. But she was on her own.

"Amy, you're on the last lap. A little more chemo and physical therapy, and your year will be up."

"My year?" she said. "It seemed like a hundred years!"

"I know, child, I know," Sy said.

"Dr. Rosen, can I play tennis again?"

Sy smiled. "Amy, my dear, can you? Yes, in time, I suppose so. Should you risk it? Not if I were you. Sure, we have replaced a prosthesis before. Do we like to do it? We always like to avoid unnecessary surgery. So I would pass up tennis."

Amy nodded solemnly as she considered Sy's advice. Then she brightened. "Doctor, I'd like to show Dr. Walt that I can walk on my own. If I went by his house, would he see me?"

Sy paused a moment, then nodded. "Yes, I think that would be a very good idea. But call him first."

While Amy was in the dressing room slipping out of her patient's gown and into her own clothes, Sy said softly, "Mrs. Bedford, does your husband play golf?"

"When he finds the time. Why?"

"A girl like Amy, so athletic, needs something to take the place of tennis, which can conceivably be a dangerous sport. The sudden starts and stops. The possibility of falling. Golf could serve a double purpose. It would channel her talent into a safer sport. And it would bring father and daughter closer together."

Mrs. Bedford nodded, smiling. "Dr. Rosen, golf together could be a *very* good idea."

"WALT, there's a call for you," Emily said, leaning into Simmie's room, where he still spent most of his time.

"I don't want to talk to anyone," he said.

"It's Amy Bedford. She wants to talk to you."

"Amy. Okay. But she's the only patient I'll talk to."

He went down to the den to take the call. He listened to Amy but refused to see her. After she pleaded, he finally acquiesced.

Emily said, "You ought to put on some respectable clothes."

He nodded grimly but went back to Simmie's room.

"BRENT, you have to drive me, you just have to," Amy Bedford said over the phone.

"I'd love to, Amy, but I don't have wheels. My car's in the shop. And my mom is at the same lunch as your mom. So there's no car here."

"I could take a cab," Amy said, "but I wanted you to be there when I show Dr. Walt. After all, you're part of this, you know."

"Hey, I got an idea. Why don't we go on my motorbike?"

"Motorbike? I haven't been on that since before all this started. It'll be like old times."

"Oh, one thing. You have to wear a helmet."

"Of course," Amy said.

BRENT Martin was extremely careful, making sure Amy was properly in place on the rear seat of his motorbike. He waited until she strapped her helmet in place, then took off for the suburb where the Duncans lived.

The trip was uneventful until they were within a few blocks of the Duncan house. A large transcontinental moving van came up on their left side. Brent slowed down to allow it to pass. Once it went by, he resumed his speed.

Then, without a signal, the truck turned right into Brent's path. Brent jammed on his brakes, but the momentum was too powerful to stop in time. His motorbike crashed into the turning truck.

WITH sirens blaring, red and white lights revolving, three squad cars converged on the scene of the accident. Moments later an ambulance pulled up. The technician in charge leaped out of the back while the driver hauled out a stretcher.

"What have we got here?" the technician asked a policeman.

"Two kids," the officer replied. "Lucky they had helmets on. But the boy seems hurt real bad."

The technician knelt over Brent Martin and made a swift appraisal of the boy's condition. He called out to the driver, "Bring the spine board!" Very carefully, with the technician supporting Brent's head, they lifted the boy onto the rigid spine board and carried him to the ambulance.

The technician now had time to examine Amy. He concluded that apart from shock she had come through the experience with no discernible physical injury. But he insisted that she come to the hospital, where there would be a follow-up diagnosis.

As soon as Brent Martin was carried into the emergency room at University Medical Center, the resident called for a single lateral cervical X ray. While the X ray was being processed, the resident asked Brent, "Feel any pain, son?"

"Yes," Brent whispered.

"Let me see you move your legs. The right one first."

Brent's response was barely discernible.

"The left one now," the resident ordered.

Brent tried but could not move it.

"Now your arms. Right one first."

Brent responded with great effort.

"Now the left," the resident said, though he had already formed his diagnosis. He called to the nurse, "Get me someone in orthopedics. Stat!"

From the examining table on which she lay, Amy Bedford called, "Get Dr. Rosen! Please!"

"Simon Rosen?" the young physician asked. "You know him?"

"I'm under his care now."

"Why didn't you say so? Nurse, find Dr. Rosen!"

Minutes later Sy Rosen came racing into emergency, asking breathlessly, "A patient of mine? Where?" Before they could tell him, he spied Amy Bedford.

The young doctor tried to get his attention. "Dr. Rosen, this other patient . . ."

But Sy brushed by him to reach Amy. He performed a careful examination of her right leg, which seemed intact and uninjured.

"Amy! Stand up!" he ordered. "Let me see you walk."

In ripped and slightly bloody slacks, Amy Bedford proceeded to walk up and back. Relieved, Sy Rosen said, "Good, Amy! We'll x-ray you. But that leg seems okay."

He turned to the younger physician. "Now, Doctor, what's on your mind?"

"This patient over here," the man said.

"Let's have a look."

Very carefully Sy Rosen examined Brent Martin.

"He needs surgery," Sy said. "And right away. Get me Pendleton, or if he's busy, Harvey or Bridges. Meantime, get hold of Clemmons in neurology. We'll need a neurosurgeon to assist."

Chapter Thirteen

MINUTES later Dr. Alan Bridges hurried into the emergency room.

"You sent for me, Sy?"

"Alan, have a look at this young man."

Sy and Amy stood aside while Bridges made his assessment of Brent Martin's condition. Amy was in tears. Sy tried to comfort her, putting his arm around her.

She kept crying and saying, "It's all my fault. I asked him to take me to see Dr. Walt. Will he die?"

"Amy, we don't know yet. But there are other things to worry about. Like what happens if he lives."

"What do you mean?"

Before Sy could answer, Bridges turned from the table. His glance to Sy indicated he would rather not discuss the patient's condition in the presence of the young woman. Sy led him to a corner of the room.

"We've got to do a total spine X ray—" Bridges began.

"Of course!" Sy interrupted impatiently. "What else? Dislocation of the spine. Possible spinal cord injury. Loss of movement in the legs."

"Partial, but clearly discernible. But you know that. Why did you send for me?" Bridges asked.

"We have to do surgery on him at once!" Sy said.

"Surgery? In a case like this? Not me!"

"What do you mean, not— Bridges, are you telling me that you *refuse?* I'm ordering you to!"

"Dr. Rosen," Bridges replied formally, "need I remind you that you are no longer chief of orthopedic surgery?"

Furious, Sy Rosen seized Bridges by the lapels of his lab coat. "Bridges, as one doctor to another, I am asking you to do surgery to reduce the injury to that boy's spinal cord."

Carefully choosing his words, Bridges said, "Dr. Rosen, in my professional opinion the chances of the patient's recovering from the surgery indicated in this case are so slight that I do not think the risk to the patient is justified."

"You don't think the risk to the patient is justified? Or you don't think the *doctor* wishes to risk it?" Sy asked angrily.

Without another word Sy went to the wall phone. He barked an order at the operator. "Get me Walt Duncan. At home!"

He held on, glaring at Dr. Bridges. Amy stood at the examining table, holding Brent's hand. He had lapsed into unconsciousness.

Sy spoke into the phone. "Hello, Walter. . . . Oh, Emily. . . . Won't come to the phone? Damn it, there's no time now for even a week of mourning. You tell him I must talk to him!"

No one in emergency dared to move.

Finally Sy Rosen said, "Walt, I want you down here at once. An emergency. The kind in which minutes can count. We've got a trauma case that demands decompression of the spinal cord by open reduction. And from what I can see, there is constrictive bony tissue that could leave this young man a quadriplegic."

"Sy, I told you—" Walter started to say.

"Walt, it's a young man you know. The young man who helped you with Amy Bedford. Now he needs your help!"

"That young man? Brent something?"

"That's him. Walt, you know what can happen to nerves under pressure for any length of time. Come down here! Stat!"

Walt had never been able to refuse Sy Rosen. Finally this time proved no exception. "All right, Sy. I'll be there."

"Good. And Walt . . ."

"Yes?"

"Let Emily drive you down. Just to make sure."

Walt Duncan hesitated. "Okay, Sy, okay."

IN TWELVE minutes Emily Duncan's car pulled alongside the ambulance dock. Walt Duncan, with a four-day growth of beard, dressed in old corduroys and an unpressed shirt, stepped out and started up the concrete steps to the emergency room.

With Emily trailing behind him he entered and nodded to Sy. While he was washing he became aware of Amy's presence. "Sy, was she involved? Was she hurt? What about that leg?"

"The leg seems fine. It's the young man I'm worried about."

Walt turned to the examining table. Applying only the most delicate touch, he proceeded to evaluate Brent Martin.

He turned to Sy and to Alan Bridges, who stood just behind the elderly doctor. "You've got to go in and decompress him. There's no other chance."

"Then do it," Bridges said.

"Not me, Alan. After what I've been through these last days, I wouldn't trust my own hands. You have to do it."

"Do I? Would you like me to cite the statistics in cases like this when surgery is done perfectly? The mortality rate? The patients who survive but lose motor ability in all four limbs?"

"Alan, look," Walt pleaded, holding out his large, trembling hands. "I can hardly keep them steady. Alan?"

Sy Rosen intervened. Grimly he said, "No, Walt. It's no use. You are looking at a new breed of doctor. Who, between taking a risk to give his patient a chance at a full life and choosing to save his own hide, chooses the coward's way out."

"Don't you call me a coward," Bridges shot back. "I didn't create this system. You know that if I operate and this boy dies or is left paralyzed, there could be a multimillion-dollar malpractice suit against me. Everything I worked for—security for my wife, education for my kids—would go down the drain."

Walt Duncan turned on Bridges. "What are you, Bridges? A businessman or a doctor?"

Bridges answered in carefully selected words. "I do not think this patient presents a justifiable risk for decompression surgery. Especially when some self-righteous saint like you might go into court and testify against me. As you did against Enright."

"Some of you will never forgive me for telling the truth, will you?" Walt demanded.

"Gentlemen, I have given you my professional opinion," Bridges said. He left the room.

"Walt?" Sy asked.

He had no need to ask anything more. Walt knew what that meant. If surgery was to be done, it had to be done at once. He felt his hands at his sides, still trembling. Whether in anger or nervous exhaustion, he did not know. But he could not move to accept Sy's challenge.

Sy looked at Emily and hoped she would intervene. Slowly she came toward her husband. She put her hands on his shoulders.

"Walt, he's a young man, a kid, really. He's got years ahead of him. You have to do it."

"I—I no longer *have* to do anything," he said. "Besides, I don't think I can. Not anymore."

"All the skill you had, did that disappear in just a few days?" she said. "Walter, what if surgery could have saved Simmie and a doctor had refused to do it?"

His eyes welled up with tears. He asked softly, "Did anyone get in touch with Brent's folks?"

"I did," Amy said.

"Then they should be here any moment," Walt said as he turned to Sy. "I'll start scrubbing. You get the informed consent. Meet me up in the OR."

He started out the door. Sy went to Emily. "Thanks, my dear. You said all that he needed to hear."

OPEN REDUCTION. THE PHRASE went through Walt's mind as he scrubbed. It meant the delicate procedure of removing pressure on the nervous system of a trauma victim. Bits of sharp, jagged bone must be carefully separated from the spinal cord, while the surgeon tries at all times not to damage the nerves themselves.

All through surgery Walt would be aware that in a case like this Bridges was right. The odds were always against the surgeon.

Sy came alongside him to scrub. "Clemmons in neurology has agreed to assist. He'll be right up."

"Good man, Clemmons, good man," Walt said.

Once Walt had thrust his hands into the surgical gloves, he began to feel more at ease. This was what he was used to. Despite the surprises that might confront him when he got inside the patient, he felt equipped to deal with them. Far better equipped than he was to deal with the sorrows of his personal life.

With Clemmons at his side and Sy across the table from him, he proceeded with considerable delicacy to lay back flap after flap of skin, tissue and the dura mater that protected the spinal cord.

He had reached the area of the damage. It was patent to the naked eye that bone splinters from crushed vertebrae were pressing on the spinal cord. Allowed to remain even for a few hours, they would result in irreversible paralysis.

He consulted Clemmons with a look. Clemmons nodded. Walt began the intricate task of extracting the tiny splinters from Brent Martin's spinal cord. That done, he proceeded to perform the fusion that would prevent any future damage. The nerve had been decompressed. What happened hereafter was in nature's hands. If all went well, the boy could have a promising future.

They wheeled the patient out to recovery. Walt Duncan tore off his gloves and tossed them into the waste container. As he untied his surgical mask he became aware that Sy was staring at him, his face still masked, only his blue eyes exposed.

"Good work, Walt," Sy said.

"Beautiful work," Clemmons said. "That's a very lucky boy. I hope he appreciates it."

Sy was stripping off his gloves and mask. "Walt," he said, "as long as you're here, I wonder if you would do me a favor. I've got a little boy in pediatric. Take a look at him?"

Walt pondered the request. "Okay. Just this one."

"That's all I ask," Sy said. "But please shave first. And comb your hair. You look like a rock star, not a surgeon."

AFTER Walter Duncan carefully examined the slight ten-year-old patient, he glanced at the boy's case history, then gestured Sy to join him outside the room. "Sy, you didn't need my opinion. His X rays and scans tell the whole story. Osteogenic sarcoma."

"What do you suggest?"

"Chemo, of course. Right away."

"I've had him on chemo. Eight weeks now."

Walt asked the crucial question. "Did the tumor shrink?"

"Noticeably," Sy said.

"Then it's obvious; go in and do a resection."

"Of course, Walt, that's what we ought to do, but there's a problem," Sy said. "When you looked at the boy's file, did you catch his address? St. Mary's Foundling Home."

"An orphan?"

"Not that lucky," Sy said. "An abused kid. His name is Thomas Mangan. The court took him away from his parents. That's also why the doctors were late in detecting his sarcoma. They assumed his pain was a residual of the abuse."

"Natural mistake. But it's not too late."

"Fortunately. However, this is a charity case. Who can I ask to operate without a fee? One of our eminent surgeons who drive sixty-thousand-dollar Mercedes? You know the excuses I'll get. Walt, just this one last case is all I ask. He's a nice kid."

"He's a nice kid, all right," Walt said. "But we're determined, Em and I, to go away. Somewhere. To forget."

"Are you going to leave all your memories behind? Going to forget Simmie too? What happened to my family was over forty years ago. Do you think I ever forget?"

Walt evaded replying by saying, "I'll do the little boy's case for you. After that, I want to be free. Free!"

Two days later Walter Duncan and Simon Rosen stood alongside each other at stainless steel sinks, scrubbing with antiseptic green soap.

"Quite a kid, isn't he?" Sy said.

Walt seemed taken by surprise, lost for the moment in the details of the surgery he was about to perform.

Sy explained, "The boy you're going to operate on. Considering what he's been through, he has terrific spirit."

"Makes you wonder," said Walt. "Don't his parents realize what a precious gift they've been given? What's going to happen to him?"

"I'm depending on you to determine that, Walt."

"I mean after we do the surgery. Let's assume that he makes a good recovery; what happens to him?"

"I don't know. I guess the courts decide."

"I hope they don't give him back to those parents," Walt said. "Those healed fractures on his X rays show he must have been abused since infancy." He paused. "I'll never forget the look on his face, the eagerness in his eyes, first time I examined him. They were pleading, Like me, love me, accept me. How could anyone raise a hand against a kid like that?"

The two doctors proceeded into the operating room. The resection on the boy was long and intense, but it went well. The titanium implant that Hans had designed fitted perfectly.

As Walt was stripping off his gloves Sy said, "Long as you're here, take a look at Brent Martin when you have a chance."

"You said he was recovering nicely," Walt countered.

"He wants to see you. He asks for you."

Brent Martin was lying in bed, his neck fixed into a rigid position to avoid risk to his spinal cord. When he heard his door swing open, his eyes strained to see who it might be. He was delighted to see that it was Walter Duncan.

"What's up, Doc?" Brent tried to joke.

"That's what I came to find out," Walt said. "How do you feel?"

"Considering I am in this torture chamber, not bad."

Walt drew back the covers. "Let's see you move your toes." Brent complied. Walt then palpated his legs, pinching gently to induce automatic responses. Good. He grasped Brent's right hand. "Press. . . . Good. Harder. . . . Very good." He repeated the same procedure with Brent's left hand. "You're doing great, son."

"Doctor, I've been hearing things. I mean, from what I heard, if you hadn't volunteered to operate on me, I might be completely paralyzed by now. Is that true?"

"Any halfway good surgeon could have done it, Brent."

"I understand at least one good surgeon refused."

"There was some disagreement on what should be done," Walt admitted, continuing his examination.

"When I think I might have had to spend my life in a wheelchair, I—I get cold sweats."

"Well, it's not going to happen. You'll be okay," Walt said.

The door opened suddenly. Walt could hear a familiar voice calling out, "Brent . . . Oh, Dr. Walt, sorry."

"Amy! You're not using your cane," Walt said, smiling.

"No. And look." She proudly walked the length of the room. "How's that?"

"Wonderful! Just great, Amy."

"Remember, you said, Give me a year of your life? Well, we did it in only eleven months!" she boasted.

"We sure did. From now on, nothing to do but build up that leg with exercise, get a checkup every three months and a bone scan every six months."

"And no more chemo!" Amy exulted.

"You're a free woman, Amy. You can take up your life again. Even tennis, if you're very careful."

"I've been thinking about that. I've decided in favor of golf."

"Good idea."

"Dad thinks so too. He says it'll give us a chance to spend time together."

"There is one other thing, Amy," Walt said. "One obligation you have. Remember, I said you'd have to talk to other patients?"

"Yes."

"Well, come with me. You'll excuse us, Brent, if I borrow Amy for a little while?"

"Just make sure to send her back."

As they walked down the corridor Walt said, "Amy, there is a boy in two twenty-nine. He's just had your kind of surgery. He's only ten. And very scared. So he needs all the courage you can give him. Okay?"

"Depend on me, Dr. Walt."

He pushed open the door to discover a nurse feeding the boy cold fruit juice through a straw. She left the room, and Walt said, "Thomas Mangan, I want you to meet another patient of mine, Amy Bedford."

"Hi, Tommy."

"Amy, walk up and down for Tommy. Let him see what he's going to be like very soon."

Amy walked the length of the boy's room, holding herself as erect as a fashion model and moving almost flawlessly.

The boy raised his head off his pillow to watch, his blue eyes wide with wonder.

"You had the same thing—" he started to ask.

"Even worse, Tommy," Walt said. "And look at her now. Well, I'll leave the two of you to get acquainted. Amy, drop by my office after you've talked to Tommy."

As he closed the door behind him he heard her saying, "You are the luckiest kid in the world to have Dr. Walt as your doctor."

WALT had returned to his office. There was an urgent message from Sy Rosen: "Call at once!"

So that's his game, Walt thought. To snow me under with so many new cases that I'll abandon my plan.

He lifted the phone and dialed. When Sy answered, Walt said, "Listen, you old faker. I know exactly what you're up to. And it won't work. Emily and I are going away. Far away! And we are not coming back! Got it?"

"Not even for the ceremony?" Sy asked.

"Ceremony? What ceremony?"

"Well, I hold here in my hand an announcement from James Rowe Russell himself."

"Sy, I am no longer interested in anything James Rowe Russell has to say. He can run this hospital any way he pleases!"

"You could at least pay me the courtesy of listening to his announcement. I quote: 'On Friday afternoon next we will hold a special ceremony in the main auditorium of this hospital to celebrate receiving a gift of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the Walter Duncan Research Fund. This grant is to be devoted to such orthopedic research as the honoree deems beneficial.' . . . Walt?" Sy asked. "Are you still there?"

"Still here. And speechless. Who in the world would do something like that?"

"More quote: 'The moneys come to us through the kindness of Bedford Industries and Mr. and Mrs. Edward Bedford.' Unquote. Walt, how would it look if you weren't there?"

"Well, I guess you're right, Sy. Okay. I'll be there. But I'm not making promises beyond that."

"I didn't ask you to, did I?" Sy replied. He hung up, smiling.

Walter Duncan hung up his phone too. He hesitated only a moment before dialing.

"Em? Darling, I hate to ask this of you. But we're going to have to put off our trip for a little while."

"Walt, I know. Sy called me first. I said it was all right."

"Em, you know what I thought? If it's all right with you, I thought I would ask them to change it to the Simone Duncan Research Fund."

"I think that would be wonderful. I want people to know that there was such a person as Simone. And to remember her always." He could detect a hint of tears in her voice.

"Em, why don't you drive down here and we'll go out to dinner together? You haven't been out in so long."

"I'd love to, darling."

"And while you're here, there's someone I want you to meet. He's ten years old. And he's got big problems. Medical problems. But other problems too. He's practically alone. They had to take him away from his parents."

"Take him away?" Emily questioned.

"The court has forbidden his parents to have any contact with him. He was abused. Badly abused."

"Oh, no!"

"What he needs now, as much as medical care, perhaps more, is to know he's not alone. He needs someone to visit him. Spend time with him. To let him know that there are kind and loving people in this world. Mostly that he is worthy of being loved. I've never seen a kid who needed it more. Em?"

"Of course, darling. I'll be there as soon as I can."

THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE pediatric pavilion had settled down for the night. All visitors had departed. Walt and Emily arrived at room 229. He knocked softly. He eased the door open.

"Tommy? Still awake?"

"Yes, Dr. Duncan."

The boy edged up in bed despite the confining burden of the Jordan splint on his left leg.

"Tommy, I want you to meet my wife, Emily."

The boy stared at her through his blue eyes. He smiled shyly.

"I hope the two of you get to be good friends in the next weeks. And will stay good friends for a long time. A very long time," Walter Duncan said.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

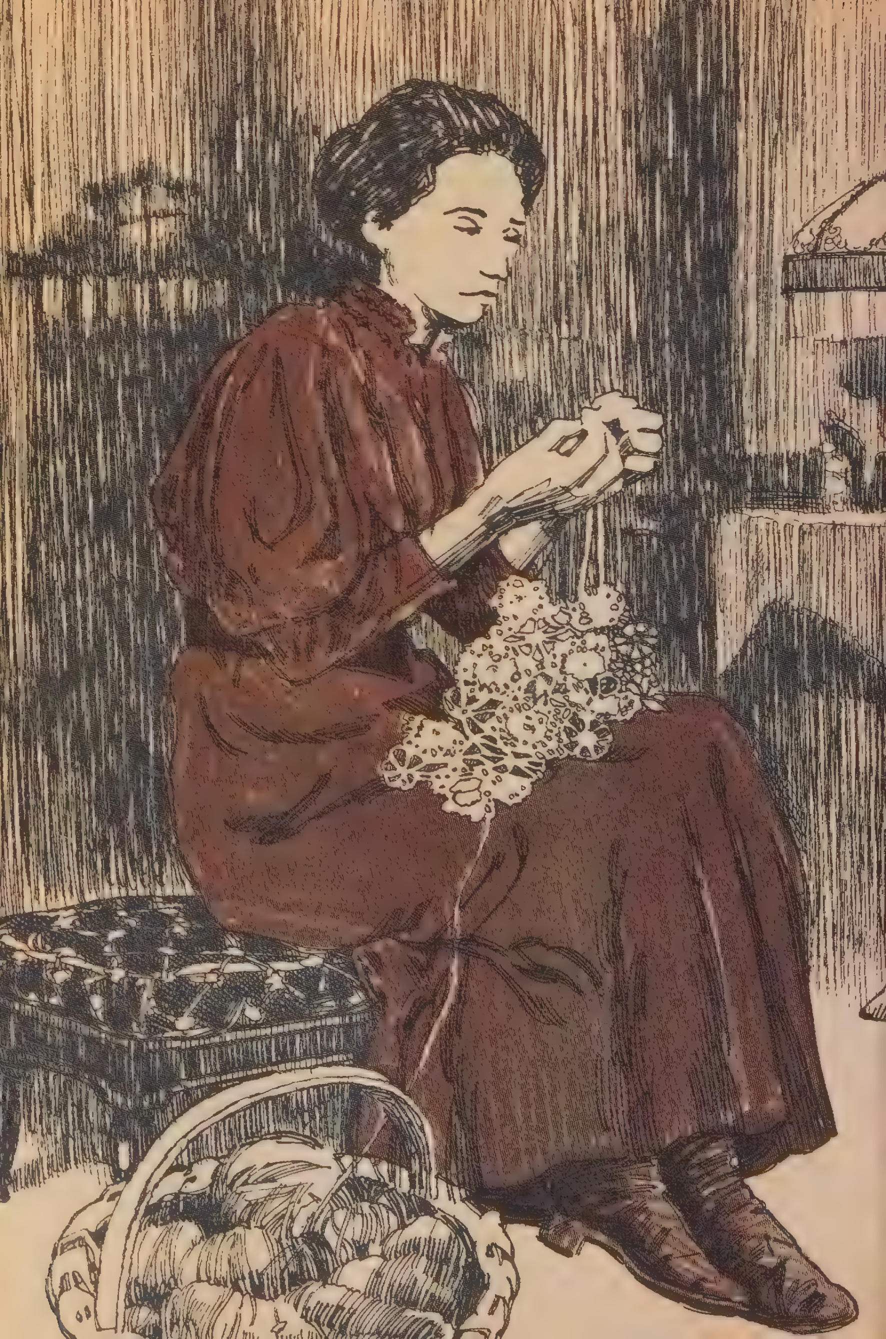
"She was a beautiful young woman of twenty-three who stepped off the elevator and walked toward me as normally as anybody would," recalls Henry Denker. "It was remarkable."

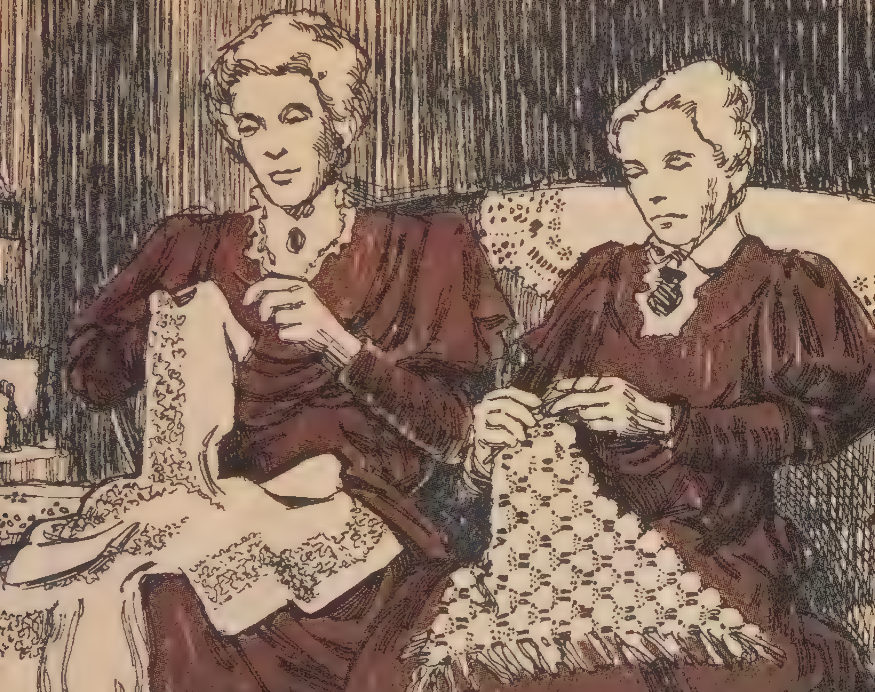
"She" was Pegeen Mularchuk—the real-life model for the character of Amy Bedford in *The Choice*. A research technician at The Hospital for Special Surgery, in New York City, Pegeen was introduced to Denker while he was doing medical research for his book. As an author who specializes in medical and legal fiction, Denker has spent many hours over the years reading technical journals, visiting hospitals and interviewing doctors. But this was the first time he had done his research with someone who had actually experienced the trials of a character he was creating.

Henry Denker

Like Amy Bedford, Pegeen was a bright, active girl in her teens when she was told she had osteogenic sarcoma in one leg. Like Amy, she endured months of chemotherapy. And even with the love and support of family and close friends, Pegeen felt the same emotional trauma that most patients undergo throughout their treatment. Pegeen too had successful surgery on the affected leg and soon after followed an arduous regimen of physical therapy and exercise to restore her natural walk. Recently married, she is now completing studies in biochemistry at New York University.

As for his own future, Henry Denker plans, simply, to write more books. That should come as good news to readers, for *The Choice* marks this popular author's tenth appearance in Condensed Books. A native New Yorker, Denker lives in Manhattan with his wife, Edith. In addition to his recent novels *Kincaid* and *Robert, My Son*, he has written many successful plays for television and Broadway.





The Ladies of Missalonghi

A condensation of the novel by

Colleen McCullough

Illustrated by Paul Birling

At Missalonghi they were all tired of wearing brown . . . tired of their genteel poverty . . . tired of being snubbed by their rich relations. But for Missy Wright, life with her widowed mother and crippled aunt was especially drab. Shy and plain, at thirty-three Missy seemed doomed to spinsterhood.

Each passing day she yearned for excitement. Each night she dreamed of romance. What she needed was a little push in the right direction. Then, thanks to Una, the glamorous librarian with a scandalous past, her life began to change. In fact, even a man turned up—the rough-hewn, elusive John Smith. Now all Missy had to do was catch him. . . .

A bewitching Cinderella tale.

"CAN you tell me, Octavia, why our luck never seems to change for the better?" asked Mrs. Drusilla Wright of her sister, adding with a sigh, "We need a new roof."

Miss Octavia Hurlingford shook her head dolefully and echoed the sigh. "Oh, dear! Are you sure?"

"Denys is."

Since their nephew Denys Hurlingford ran the local ironmongery and had a thriving plumbing business as well, his word was law in such matters.

"How much will a new roof cost? Must it be a whole one?"

"There isn't one sheet of iron worth keeping, Denys says, so we're looking at about fifty pounds, I'm afraid."

A gloomy silence fell, each sister cudgeling her brain in search of a source for the necessary funds. They were sitting side by side on a horsehair-stuffed sofa whose better days were far in the past. Mrs. Drusilla Wright was hemstitching a linen cloth with microscopically fine, meticulous skill, and Miss Octavia Hurlingford was occupied with a crochet hook, the work dangling from it as exquisitely done as the hemstitching.

"We could use the fifty pounds Father put in the bank for me when I was born," offered the third occupant of the room. She was also working, sitting on a low stool, producing lace from a tatting shuttle and a ball of ecru thread.

"Thank you, but no," said Drusilla.

And that was the end of the only conversation occurring during the two-hour work period of Friday afternoon, for not long afterward the hall clock began to chime four. While the last vibrations still lingered in the air, all three ladies proceeded to put away their handicrafts, Drusilla her sewing, Octavia her crocheting, and Missy her tatting. Each lady disposed of her work inside an identical gray flannel drawstring bag, after which each lady disposed of her bag inside a battered mahogany sideboard.

The routine never, never varied. At four o'clock a different two-hour session began. Drusilla moved to the organ, which was her only treasure and only pleasure, while Octavia and Missy moved to the kitchen, there to prepare the evening meal.

As they clustered in the doorway like three hens unsure of the pecking order, it was easy to see that Drusilla and Octavia were sisters. Each was extremely tall and each had a long, bony, fair face; but where Drusilla was sturdily large and muscular, Octavia was crabbed and diminished by a long-standing bone disease. Missy shared the height, though not so much of it, being a mere five feet seven to her aunt's five feet ten and her mother's six feet. Nothing else did she have in common, for she was as dark as they were fair and as flat-chested as they were ample.

The kitchen was a big bare room at the back of the dim central hall, its brown-painted wooden walls contributing their mite to the general atmosphere of gloominess.

"Peel the potatoes before you go out to pick the beans, Missy," said Octavia as she strapped on the voluminous brown pinny that protected her brown dress from the perils of cooking. While Missy peeled the three potatoes Octavia shook up the coals in the black iron range; she then added fresh wood, adjusted the damper, and put a huge iron kettle on to boil. This done, she turned to the pantry to get out the raw materials for next morning's porridge.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaimed, emerging a moment later to display a brown paper bag whose bottom corners bled a flurry of oats. "Look at this! Mice!"

"Don't worry, I'll set some traps tonight," said Missy.

"Traps tonight won't get our breakfast on the table. Ask your mother if you can run to Uncle Maxwell's to buy more oats."

"Couldn't we do without for once?" Missy hated oats.

"In *winter?*" Octavia stared at her as if she had gone mad. "A good big bowl of porridge is cheap, my girl, and sets you up for the whole day. Now hurry, for goodness' sake!"

On the hall side of the kitchen door the organ music was deafening. Drusilla was an appallingly bad player who had never been told other than that she was very good. Each Sunday she inflicted her lack of talent on the largely Hurlingford congregation at the Byron Church of England; luckily no Hurlingford had an ear for music.

Missy crept into the parlor, not the room where the ladies did their handwork, but the one reserved for important occasions, and where the organ lived; there Drusilla was assaulting Bach with all the clangor and thunder of a knight jousting against his rival, seated with her back straight and her eyes closed.

"Mother?" It was the smallest whisper; however, it was enough. Drusilla opened her eyes and turned her head, more in resignation than anger.

"Well?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but we need more oats before Uncle Maxwell shuts. The mice got at the bag."

Drusilla sighed. "Bring me my purse, then."

The purse was fetched and sixpence fished from its flaccid recesses. "*Bulk* oats, mind! All you pay for with a proprietary brand of oats is the fancy box."

"No, Mother! Proprietary oats taste much better." A faint hope entered Missy's breast. "In fact, if you and Aunt Octavia would rather eat them, I'll gladly go without to make up the difference."

Drusilla was always telling herself that she lived for the day her timid daughter showed signs of defiance, but this present humble bid for independence only ran up against an authoritarian wall. Shocked, she said, "Go without? Most definitely not! Porridge is our winter staple, and it's a lot cheaper than coal fires." Then her voice became friendlier. "What's the temperature?"

Missy consulted the thermometer at the end of the hall. "Forty-two!" she called.

"Then we'll eat in the kitchen and spend the evening there," shouted Drusilla, beginning to give Bach another belting.

WRAPPED UP IN HER BROWN serge overcoat, a brown fleecy scarf, and a brown bonnet, with the sixpence tucked down into the finger of one brown woolen glove, Missy let herself out of the house and hurried down the neat brick path to the front gate. In a small shopping bag was her library book; opportunities to sneak in an extra trip to the library were few and far between, and if she really scampered, no one need know she had done more than go to Uncle Maxwell's in search of oats.

The air was full of a soft, fine mist that dithered between fog and rain and covered the privet hedge along the boundary of the house named Missalonghi with fat, round drops of water. The moment Missy stepped out into Gordon Road she turned right and began to run, only slowing to a rapid walk at the corner because that wretchedly painful stitch was back in her left side, and it really did hurt. Slowing down definitely eased her discomfort, however, so she trotted along more sedately, and began to experience the glow of happiness that always came when she was offered this rarest of treats—a chance to escape on her own from the confines of Missalonghi. And the minute the stitch disappeared she commenced to look around her at the familiar sights Byron had to offer on a late winter afternoon.

Everything in the town of Byron was named after some aspect of Lord Byron, including her mother's house, Missalonghi, christened after the place where the poet had expired untimely. This bizarre urban nomenclature was the fault of Missy's great-grandfather the first Sir William Hurlingford, who had founded his town hard on the heels of reading *Childe Harold*, and was so pleased he had actually discovered a great work of literature he could understand that ever after he had rammed indigestible amounts of Byron down the throat of everyone he knew. Thus Missalonghi was situated in Gordon Road, and Gordon Road ran into Noel Street, and Noel Street ran into Byron Street, which was the main thoroughfare. There was even a tiny cul-de-sac called Caroline Lamb Place, situated on the wrong side of the railway line (as was the house named Missalonghi); here dwelled a dozen very brassy women of distinctly shady reputation.

Oh, how beautiful! Missy stopped to marvel at a huge spider's web beaded by the soft feelers of mist that trailed pulsating up out of the invisible valley on the far side of Gordon Road. Then she remembered the time and began to run again, turning eventually into Byron Street and heading for the row of shops that marched down either side of one block in the center of the town. There was the grocery and feed store, owned by Maxwell Hurlingford; the millinery shop, owned by Aurelia Marshall, née Hurlingford; the clothing emporium, owned by Herbert Hurlingford; the news agency and stationery shop, owned by Septimus Hurlingford; the Weeping Willow Tea Room, owned by Julia Hurlingford; and the lending library, owned by Livilla Hurlingford.

As befitted its importance, Byron Street was sealed with macadam, provided with an ornate, polished granite horse trough, donated by the first Sir William, and possessed of proper hitching posts right along its awninged section of shops. It was lined with very beautiful old gum trees, and contrived to look both peaceful and prosperous.

The town made its living from visitors who aspired to ease their rheumatic aches and pains by soaking in the hot mineral waters some geological freak had placed beneath Byron ground. Therefore, all along Byron Street were many guesthouses and boardinghouses, mostly owned and run by Hurlingfords, of course. The Byron Waters Baths provided a most agreeable standard of comfort for those not precisely penny-pinched, while for those whose pecuniary resources just stretched to one of the cheaper boardinghouses, there existed the clean if spartan pools of the Byron Spa, right around the corner.

Even those too poor to come to the town of Byron at all were catered to. The second Sir William had invented the Byron Bottle, as it was known throughout Australia and the South Pacific: a one-pint, artistically slender, crystal-clear bottle of Byron's best spring water, gently effervescent, mildly but never disastrously aperient, distinctly tasty. Vichy water be damned! said those fortunate enough to have traveled to France. The good old Byron Bottle was not only better, it was also a great deal cheaper. And there was a penny refund on the empty too. Judicious buying of shares in the glassworks had put the final polish on this remarkably lucrative local industry; it continued to make enormous sums of money for all the male descendants of the second Sir

William. The third Sir William, grandson of the first and son of the second, currently presided over the Byron Bottle Company empire with all the ruthlessness and rapaciousness of his earlier namesakes.

Maxwell Hurlingford, in direct line from the first Sir William and therefore a hugely wealthy man in his own right, did not need to run a grocery and feed store. However, commercial instinct and acumen in the Hurlingfords died hard.

When Missy entered the shop, a bell tinkled raucously, and at the sound Maxwell emerged from the nether regions out back, where resided the bran and chaff and wheat and barley and pollard and oats in towering stacks of hempen bags. His face bore its normal expression—sour—and his right hand held a big scoop whiskered with webby strands of fodder.

"Look at this!" he snarled, waving the scoop at Missy. "Weevils all over the place."

"Oh, dear! The bulk oats too?"

"The lot," he grumbled, putting the scoop down and squeezing behind the grocery counter.

"Then you'd better give me a box of proper breakfast oats, please, Uncle Maxwell."

The bell erupted into agitated life again as a man came through the door with a huge swirl of cold misty air and a dazzling briskness of purpose.

"Bloody hell, it's cold out there!" gasped the newcomer, slapping his hands together.

"Sir! There are *ladies* present!"

"Oops!" said the newcomer, neglecting to follow this sop with an apology proper. Instead, he bellied up to the counter and grinned wickedly down at the gaping Missy. "Ladies in the plural, man? I can only see half a one!"

Neither Missy nor Uncle Maxwell could work out whether this was merely an insulting reference to her lack of height in a town of giants, or whether he was grossly insulting her by inferring she was not really a lady. So by the time Uncle Maxwell had collected the use of his famously acid wits, the stranger was already well embarked upon his list of requirements.

"I want six bags of bran and pollard, a bag of flour, a bag of sugar, a box of twelve-gauge cartridges, a side of bacon, six tins of baking powder, ten pounds of tinned butter, six tins of plum jam, and a ten-pound tin of Arnott's mixed biscuits."

"It is five minutes to five, and I close at five on the dot," said Uncle Maxwell stiffly.

"Then you'd better hop to it, hadn't you?" asked the stranger unsympathetically.

The box of proprietary oats was sitting on the counter; Missy milked her sixpence out of the finger of her glove and tendered it, waiting in vain for Uncle Maxwell to give her any change. In the end she picked up the oats and left, but not before stealing another glance at the stranger.

He had a cart drawn by two horses, for such was tethered outside the store and had not been there when Missy entered. A good-looking equipage too; the horses were trim and sleek, and the cart seemed new.

Four minutes to five. If she reversed the order of their arrival in the shop, she could plead the stranger's rudeness and vast order as an excuse for being late, and thereby manage to fit in a dash to the library. The town of Byron possessed no public library; few towns in Australia did in those days. But there was a privately owned lending library to fill the gap. Livilla Hurlingford was a widow with a very expensive son; economic need allied to the need always to appear respectable had driven her to open a well-stocked bookroom.

Books were Missy's only solace and sole luxury. She was permitted to keep the money she made from selling Missalonghi's excess eggs and butter, and she spent all of this pittance borrowing books from her aunt Livilla's library. Provided she did her allotted share of the work—and did it properly—neither her mother nor her aunt Octavia objected if Missy read, though they objected strenuously if she voiced a desire to go walking through the bush. To walk through the bush was to place her debatably desirable person smack in the path of murder or rapine, and was not going to be permitted under any circumstances. Drusilla therefore ordered her cousin Livilla to supply Missy only with *good* books: no novels whatsoever, no scandalous biographies, no reading matter aimed at the masculine gender. This dictum

Aunt Livilla policed rigorously, having the same ideas as Drusilla about what unmarried ladies should read.

But for the last month Missy had harbored a guilty secret; she was being supplied with novels galore. Aunt Livilla had found herself an assistant to run the library on Monday and Tuesday and Saturday. Of course the new assistant was a Hurlingford, though not one from Byron; she hailed from the fleshpots of Sydney.

People rarely took any notice of the tongue-tied and sadly inhibited Missy Wright, but Una, the new assistant, had seemed instantly to detect in Missy the stuff of a good friend. From the beginning, Una had drawn Missy out to an amazing degree; she knew Missy's habits, prospects, troubles, and dreams. She had also worked out a foolproof system whereby Missy might borrow forbidden fruit without Aunt Livilla's finding out, and she plied Missy with novels of all kinds, from the most adventurous to the most wildly romantic.

Of course tonight it would be Aunt Livilla on duty, so her book would have to be of the old kind. Yet when Missy came into the cheery warmth of the bookroom, there sat Una behind the desk, and of the dreaded Aunt Livilla there was no sign.

More than Una's undeniable liveliness and understanding had endeared her to Missy; she was a truly remarkable looking woman as well. Her figure was excellent, her height sufficient to mark her as a true Hurlingford, and her clothes reminded Missy of her cousin Alicia's clothes, always in good taste, always in the latest fashion. Even more intriguing was Una's curious, luminous quality, a delicious bloom that lay not so much upon her skin as inside it; her nails, oval and long, radiated this light-filled essence, as did her hair, piled in the latest puffs all around her head and culminating in a glittering blond topknot. The air around her took on a sheen that was there and yet was not there. Fascinating! Lifelong exposure to none save Hurlingfords had left Missy unprepared for the phenomenon of the person with an aura; now, within the space of a month, she had met two of them: Una with her luminescence, and today the stranger in Uncle Maxwell's with a cloud of energy crackling around him.

"Goody!" cried Una at sight of Missy. "Darling, I have a novel you're going to adore! All about a young noblewoman of indigent means who is obliged to go governessing in the house of a duke. She falls in love with the duke, and he gets her into trouble, then refuses to have anything to do with her because his wife has all the money. So he ships her to India, where this terrifically handsome maharajah sees her and falls in love with her on the spot. He kidnaps her, marries her, and casts off all his other women, because he says she is a jewel of such rarity she must have no rival. Then the duke arrives in India with his regiment of hussars to quell a native uprising in the hills, which he does, only he's fatally wounded in the battle. She takes the duke into her alabaster palace, where he finally dies in her arms, but only after she forgives him for so cruelly wronging her. Isn't that a wonderful story? You'll just adore it, I promise!"

Being told the entire plot never put Missy off a book, so she accepted *Dark Love* at once and tucked it down on the bottom of her shopping bag, feeling as she did so for her own little money purse. But it wasn't there.

"I'm afraid I've left my purse at home," she said to Una, as mortified as only someone very poor and very proud can be. "Oh, dear! Well, you'd better have the book back until Monday."

"Heavens, darling, it's not the end of the world to forget your money! Take the book now. You can pay me next time you're in."

"Thank you," said Missy, knowing she ought not to embark upon a course of action utterly against the precepts of Missalonghi but helpless in the face of her lust for books. Smiling, she began to back out of the shop as fast as she could.

"Don't go yet," pleaded Una. "Stay and talk to me, do!"

"Well, all right, but only for a minute."

"What I want to know is if you've set eyes on John Smith yet," said Una, her sparkling nails fluttering about her sparkling topknot, her blue-white eyes glowing.

"John Smith? Who's John Smith?"

"The chap who bought your valley last week."

Missy's valley was not actually her valley, of course—it simply lay along the far side of Gordon Road—but she always thought of it as hers and had told Una more than once about her longing to walk through it. Her face fell.

"Oh, what a shame!" she said.

"Pooh! It's a jolly good thing, if you ask me. Time someone got his foot in the Hurlingford door."

"Well, I've never heard of this John Smith, and I'm sure I've never seen him," Missy said, now turning to go.

"How do you know you've never seen him when you won't even stay to hear what he looks like?"

A vision of the stranger in Uncle Maxwell's shop suddenly rose in front of Missy's eyes; she closed them and said, more positively than usual, "He's very tall and solidly built. He has curly auburn hair, an auburn beard with two streaks of white in it, his clothes are rough, and he swears like a trooper. His face is nice, but his eyes are even nicer."

"That's him, that's him!" squeaked Una. "So you have seen him! Where? Tell me all!"

"He came into Uncle Maxwell's shop a few minutes ago and bought a great many supplies."

"Really? Then he must be moving into his valley." Una grinned at Missy wickedly. "I think you liked what you saw, didn't you, little Missy Sly-Boots?"

"Yes, I did," said Missy, blushing.

"So did I when I first saw him," said Una idly.

"When was that?"

"Ages ago. Years ago, in fact, darling. In Sydney."

"You *know* him?"

"Very well indeed," said Una, sighing.

The last month's spate of novels had vastly expanded Missy's emotional education; she felt confident enough to ask, "Did you love him?"

But Una laughed. "No, darling. One thing you can be absolutely sure of, I never loved him."

"Does he come from Sydney?" asked Missy, relieved.

"Among other places. He was a friend of my husband's."

This was news indeed to Missy. "Oh, I am sorry, Una! I had no idea you were widowed."

Una laughed again. "Darling, I am not a widow! Wallace, my husband, is still very much alive. The best way to describe my late marriage is to say that he divorced himself from it—and me."

In all her life Missy had never before met a divorcée. Hurlingfords did not sunder marriages, be they made in heaven or hell or limbo. "It must have been very difficult for you," she said quietly, on her mettle not to appear prim or shocked.

"Darling, only I know how difficult it was." Una's light disappeared. "It was a marriage of convenience, actually. He found my social standing convenient—or rather his father did—and I found his pots and pots of money convenient."

"Didn't you love him?"

"My whole trouble, darling—and it has wound me up in a lot of trouble—is that I have never loved anybody half so well as myself." She pulled a face. "Mind you, Wallace was well schooled in all the proper things, and very presentable to look at. But his father—ugh! His father was a dreadful little man who smelled of cheap pomade and even cheaper tobacco and didn't know the first thing about manners. However, he had a burning ambition to see his son sitting on top of the Australian heap, so he'd poured a great deal of money into producing the kind of son a Hurlingford wouldn't balk at. Where the truth was that his son liked the simple life, didn't want to sit on top of the heap, and only tried because he loved that awful old man quite desperately."

"What happened?" asked Missy.

"The old man died not long after the marriage came crashing down. As for Wallace—I made him hate me as no man should hate any woman."

"I can't believe that," said Missy loyally.

"I daresay you genuinely can't. But it's true, all the same. Over the years since it happened, I've been forced to admit that I was a greedy, selfish woman who should have been drowned at birth."

"Oh, Una, don't!"

"Darling, don't weep for me, I'm not worth it," said Una, hard and brilliant again. "Truth's truth, that's all. So here I am, washed ashore for the very last time in a backwater like Byron, doing penance for my sins."

"And your husband?"

"He's come out all right. He's finally found a chance to do everything he always wanted to do."

There were a hundred other questions Missy was dying to ask, but the small pause that ensued after Una finished speaking brought time back with a jolt. A hasty good-bye and she fled before Una could detain her further.

She ran almost all the five miles home, stitch or no stitch in her side, and her feet must have grown wings, for when she came breathless through the kitchen door, she discovered mother and aunt perfectly ready to accept the story of John Smith's huge order as sufficient excuse for tardiness. Drusilla had milked the cow, Octavia's bones being unequal to the task; the beans were picked, and three lamb chops sizzled in a frying pan. The ladies of Missalonghi sat down on time to eat their dinner. And afterward came the final chore of the day, the darning of much laundered and much worn stockings and linens.

Rather sleepily Missy listened to Drusilla and Octavia as they indulged in their nightly dissection of whatever news might have come their news-starved way. Tonight, after an initial period of mystified discussion about the stranger in Maxwell Hurlingford's shop—Missy had not passed on what she had gleaned from Una—they proceeded to the most interesting event looming on the Byron social calendar—cousin Alicia's wedding.

"It will have to be my brown silk, Drusilla," said Octavia.

"And it will have to be my brown grosgrain, and it will have to be Missy's brown linen. I am so tired of brown!" cried Drusilla.

"But in our circumstances, sister, brown is the most sensible color for us," comforted Octavia, not very successfully.

"Just once," said Drusilla savagely, jamming her needle into her spool of thread and folding an invisibly mended pillowcase, "I would so much like to be silly rather than sensible!"

MISSY had her own room, timber paneled and as brown as the rest of the house. The floor was covered in a mottled brown linoleum, the bed in a brown candlewick spread, the window in a brown holland blind; there was an ugly old bureau and an even older, uglier wardrobe. No mirror, no chair, no rug.

Blue with cold, she shed her brown dress, her flannel petticoat, and her woolen stockings and bloomers, folding them neatly before placing the underwear in a drawer and the dress on a hook in the wardrobe. Missalonghi's water tank held only five hundred gallons, which made water a very precious commodity; bodies were bathed daily, the three ladies sharing the same scant bathwater, but underwear had to last two days.

Missy's nightgown was of prickly flannel, but the bed was warm. On Missy's thirtieth birthday her mother had announced that she might have a hot brick during cold weather, since she was no longer in the first flush of youth. And when that happened, welcome though it had been, Missy abandoned forever any hope that she might one day find a life for herself outside the confines of Missalonghi.

Sleep usually came quickly, for she led a physically active life, however emotionally sterile it was. But the few moments between lying down in this blessed warmth and the onset of unconsciousness represented her only period of utter freedom, so Missy always fought sleep as long as she could.

She would begin by wondering what she really looked like. The house owned only one mirror, in the bathroom, and it was forbidden to stand and gaze at one's reflection. Thus Missy's impressions of herself were hedged with guilt that she might have stayed too long gazing. Oh, she knew she was fairly tall. She knew she was far too thin, that her hair was dark, that her eyes were black-brown. She knew her mouth drooped down at its left corner and twisted up at its right, but she didn't know this made her rare smiles fascinating and her normally solemn expression a clownlike tragicomedy. Life had taught her to think of herself as a very homely person, yet something in her refused to believe that entirely. So each night she would wonder what she looked like.

She would also dream of being allowed to walk through the bush in the valley opposite Missalonghi. If she wore clothes, they did not hamper her; nor did they get wet when she waded cascading streams; nor did they become soiled when she brushed against mossy boulders; and they were never, never brown. Bellbirds flew chiming around her head, butterflies flickered gorgeously everywhere; nowhere did another human soul intrude.

Lately she had begun to contemplate death, which appeared to her more and more a consummation devoutly to be wished. Death was everywhere, and visited young and in-between as often as old. Consumption, fits, croup, diphtheria, growths, pneumonia, apoplexy, heart trouble, strokes. Why then should she be preserved from its hand? Death was not an unwelcome prospect at all; it never is to those who exist rather than live.

But this night Missy was wakeful through the gamut of looks, bush walks, and death, in spite of extreme weariness. For she had made herself save some time to devote to the big wild stranger named John Smith, who had bought her valley, or so Una said. Missy conjured up an image of him, tall and heavyset and strong, with lovely, luxuriant dark red hair and beard. Impossible to tell his age accurately, because of his weather-beaten face, though she guessed him to be somewhere on the wrong side of forty. His eyes were a clear amber brown. Oh, such a nice man!

And when, to round out this nocturnal pilgrimage, she went once more upon her bush walk, he walked with her all the way into sleep.

THE poverty that ruled Missalonghi with such cruel inflexibility was the fault of the first Sir William, who had sired seven sons and nine daughters, most of whom had survived to produce further progeny. It had been Sir William's policy to distribute his worldly goods among his sons only, leaving his daughters possessed of a dowry consisting of a house on five good acres of land. On the surface it seemed a sensible policy, discouraging fortune hunters while ensuring the girls the status of landowners as well as a measure of independence. His sons had continued the policy, since it meant more money for them, and so in their turn had their sons. Only as the decades passed, the houses became steadily less commodious, less well built, and the five good acres of land tended to become five not-so-good acres of land.

The result two generations later was that the Hurlingford connection was sharply divided into several camps: uniformly wealthy males, females who were well off due to fortunate marriages, and a group of females who had either been tricked out of their land or struggled to subsist upon it, like Drusilla Hurlingford Wright.

She had married one Eustace Wright, the consumptive heir to a large Sydney accounting firm; at the time of her marriage she had not suspected the consumption any more than had Eustace himself. But after his death only two years later, Eustace's father had elected to leave his property entirely to his second son rather than divert part of it to a widow with no better heir than a sickly girl child. So what had started as an excellent essay into matrimony ended dismally in every way. Afterward Drusilla eked out an existence. She had taken in her spinster sister Octavia, who sold her own house and five acres to their brother Herbert in order to contribute cash to Drusilla's household. Therein lay the rub; it was inconceivable to sell to an outsider, yet the male Hurlingfords took gross advantage of this. The ungenerous sum Herbert gave Octavia for her property was immediately invested by him on her behalf, and as investments masterminded by Herbert had a habit of doing, this particular one yielded absolutely nothing. The few timid inquiries Octavia had made of her brother were brushed aside at first, then treated with outraged anger and indignation.

It was also inconceivable that any female Hurlingford should disgrace the clan by going out to work, unless work could be found for her safely within the bosom of a family enterprise. Thus Drusilla, Octavia, and Missy stayed at home, their utter lack of capital preventing their sanctifying work through the medium of owning a business, their utter lack of useful talents meaning the family regarded them as unemployable.

To fill in their empty days the ladies of Missalonghi knitted and tatted and crocheted and sewed endlessly, grateful for the gifts of wools and threads and linens that came their way each Christmas and birthday, giving back some of the end results as their gifts in their turn, and stockpiling a great deal more in the spare room.

Any dreams Drusilla might have harbored about Missy's growing up to snatch the ladies of Missalonghi out of penury via marriage died before Missy turned ten; she was always homely and unprepossessing. By the time she turned twenty, her mother and her aunt had reconciled themselves to the same remorselessly straitened circumstances all the way to their graves.

Of course, they did manage to live. They had a Jersey cow that produced wonderfully rich and creamy milk as well as splendid calves, a Jersey heifer they had kept because she was superlative, half a dozen sheep, three dozen Rhode Island Red fowls, and a dozen assorted ducks and geese. The vegetable garden, which was Missy's province, produced something all year round. There was a modest orchard too—ten apples of various kinds, a peach, a cherry, a plum, an apricot, and four pear trees. They sold their fruit and butter and eggs to Maxwell Hurlingford for a lot less than they could have gotten elsewhere, but it was inconceivable that they should sell their produce to anyone but a Hurlingford.

Food they did not lack; money was what beggared them. Prevented from earning a wage and cheated by their relatives, they depended for the cash that meant clothing and utensils and medicines and new roofs upon the sale of a sheep or a calf. That Missy was dearly loved by the two older women showed visibly in only one way: they let her squander her egg-and-butter money upon the borrowing of books.

Their genteel poverty was never more galling to Drusilla Wright than on each Saturday morning when she came on foot through Byron and out to where the most prosperous of the Hurlingford residences, Mon Repos, hunched across the flanks of the hills. She went to have morning tea with her sister Aurelia, and she made the pilgrimage alone, Octavia being too crippled to walk the seven miles. Keeping a horse was out of the question. If they couldn't walk, the ladies of Missalonghi stayed home.

Aurelia had also married out of the family, but far more judiciously, as things turned out. Edmund Marshall was the general manager of the bottling plant. So Aurelia lived in a twenty-room imitation Tudor mansion set on four acres planted with rhododendron and azalea and ornamental cherry. Aurelia had servants, horses, carriages, even a motorcar. Her sons were apprenticed to their father in the bottling plant and showed great promise, Ted on the accounting side and Randolph as a supervisor.

Aurelia also had a daughter, a daughter who was everything Drusilla's daughter was not. The two possessed only one fact in common: they were both thirty-three-year-old spinsters. But Alicia was still single for the most glamorous and heartrending of reasons. The fiancé she had accepted in her nineteenth year was gored to death by a maddened elephant only weeks before their wedding. Montgomery Massey had been the only child of a famous family of Ceylon tea planters, and very, very rich. Alicia had mourned him in full accordance with his social significance.

For a whole year she had worn black; then for two more years she wore only dove gray or pale lilac, these being the colors referred to as half mourning; then, at twenty-two, she announced the period of retirement was over by opening a millinery boutique. Convention demanded that the business be placed in her mother's name, but no one, least of all her mother, was under any illusion as to whose business it was. The hat shop, called Chez Chapeau Alicia, was a resounding success from the moment it opened its doors. She employed two landless, dowerless female relations in her workroom and her spinster aunt Cornelia as her aristocratic sales dame, confining her own share of the enterprise to design and to banking the profits.

Then, just when everyone had assumed that Alicia was going to wear the willow for Montgomery Massey until she too died, she announced her engagement to William Hurlingford, son and heir of the third Sir William. She was thirty-one at the time, and her prospective bridegroom, known as Little Willie, was only just nineteen. Their wedding was set for the first day of this coming October, when the long wait would finally be over. That there had been a long wait was the fault of the third Sir William's wife, Lady Billy, who on hearing the news attempted to flog Alicia with a horsewhip. The third Sir William had been forced to forbid the couple to marry until the groom turned twenty-one.

So it was with no joy in her at all that Drusilla Wright marched up the well-raked gravel drive of Mon Repos and applied the knocker to her sister's front door. The butler answered, informed Drusilla loftily that Mrs. Marshall was in the small drawing room, and conducted her there imperturbably.

The interior of Mon Repos was as charmingly right as its façade and gardens: pale wood panels, silk and velvet wallpapers, Axminster carpets, Regency furniture—all perfectly arranged.

The sisters kissed cheeks, more alike in every way than either of them to Octavia or Julia or Cornelia or Augusta or Antonia, for both of them possessed a certain brand of haughty frostiness, and their smiles were identical. They were also more fond of each other than of any of the rest; and only Drusilla's implacable pride prevented Aurelia from assisting her financially.

After the greetings were over, they settled on either side of a small marquetry table in velvet-covered chairs, and waited until the maid had served them from a tray of China tea and two dozen fairy cakes before getting down to business.

"Now it's not a scrap of use being proud, Drusilla. I do know how desperately you need the money, and can you give me one good reason why all those lovely things should pile up in your spare room? You can't plead that you're saving them for Missy's glory box when we both know Missy said her last prayers years ago. Alicia wants to buy her household linens from you, and I am in full accord," said Aurelia firmly.

"I'm flattered," said Drusilla stiffly, "but I cannot *sell* them to you, Aurelia. Alicia may have whatever she wants as our gift."

"Nonsense!" countered the lady of the manor. "One hundred pounds, and let her take her pick."

The argument went on for some time, but in the end poor Drusilla was obliged to give in, her outraged pride warring with a secret relief so great it finally vanquished pride. And after she had drunk three cups of fragrant Lapsang Souchong and eaten her confection-starved way through almost the entire plate of perfectly iced pink and white fairy cakes, she and her sister had passed from the awkwardness of their social disparity to the coziness of their social consanguinity.

"Billy says the new fellow in town is a jailbird," said Aurelia.

"In *Byron?* Heavens, how did Billy let this happen?"

Billy was their cousin, the third Sir William.

"He couldn't do a thing to prevent it, sister. You know as well as I do that it is a myth, the Hurlingfords owning every acre of land around here. If the man could buy the valley, which apparently he has done, and if he has paid his debt to society, which apparently he has also done, then there is nothing Billy or anyone else can do to drive him out."

"When did all this take place?"

"Last week, according to Billy. This chap bought it at auction in Sydney without our even learning it was for sale. The whole valley, if you please, and dirt cheap! Billy is livid."

"How did you find out about it?" asked Drusilla.

"The fellow arrived in Maxwell's shop yesterday just on closing time—Missy was there too, apparently."

Drusilla's face cleared. "So that's who he was! Maxwell found out, I take it? He could prize information out of a deaf-mute."

"Yes. Oh, the fellow wasn't at all backward. He talked about it very frankly."

"What I fail to understand is why anyone other than a Hurlingford would *want* to buy the valley! It would take him ten years to clear enough to farm, and he can't log it, because the road out is too dangerous. So why?"

"According to Maxwell, he said he just wants to live alone in the bush and listen to the silence. Well, if he isn't actually a jailbird, you must admit he's a bit eccentric!"

"What exactly makes Billy think he's a jailbird?"

"Maxwell phoned Billy as soon as the fellow had gone. And Billy set inquiries going at once. The fellow calls himself John Smith, if you please!" Aurelia snorted derisively. "Now I ask you, Drusilla, would anyone call himself John Smith unless there was real dirty work at the crossroads?"

"It might be his proper name," said Drusilla fairly.

"Pooh! Billy thinks it's an alias. Anyway, the man has no records with any official body. He paid in gold for the valley, and that's as much as can be found out."

"How extraordinary!" said Drusilla as she reached for the second-to-last fairy cake. "Did Maxwell have anything to add?"

"Well, John Smith bought a very large quantity of food, and he paid in gold. Out of a big money belt under his shirt, and he wasn't wearing an undergarment, either! Luckily, by then Missy had gone, for Maxwell swears the fellow would have pulled up his shirt just the same. He *cursed* in front of Missy, *and* he said something or other that implied Missy was no lady! With *no* provocation, I assure you!"

"I believe that," said Drusilla dryly, taking the last fairy cake.

At which point Alicia Marshall came into the room. Her mother beamed at her proudly and her aunt gave her a wry little smile. Why oh why couldn't Missy have been like Alicia?

A truly exquisite creature, Alicia Marshall. Very tall and built on voluptuous yet disciplined lines, she was angelically fair of skin and hair and eyes, with beautiful hands and feet, and a swanlike neck. As always, she was dressed in perfect taste and wore her ice-blue silk gown with incomparable grace. One of her own hats, a tumbled mass of ice-blue tulle and ice-green silk roses, adorned her pale gold hair.

"Your aunt Drusilla would be happy to provide your household linens, Alicia," announced Aurelia triumphantly.

Alicia removed her hat and stripped off her long, ice-blue kid gloves carefully. Only then did she activate her disappointingly flat and unmusical voice. "How very kind of you, Aunt," she said.

"Kindness does not enter into it, my dear niece, since your mother is determined to pay me," said Drusilla stiffly. "You had better come to Missalonghi next Saturday morning and pick out whatever you want. I shall host morning tea."

With that pronouncement Drusilla rose to go. All the way home she mentally catalogued the contents of the spare room and various cupboards, terrified that the amount and variety were not going to prove sufficient for the honest sale of one hundred pounds. One hundred pounds! What a lovely windfall! Of course part of it would have to pay for the new roof, but at least they would not have to sell the Jersey heifer now.

Yes, it was most satisfactory! Alicia was a notable trendsetter; perhaps in future other brides-to-be would come to the ladies of Missalonghi to buy their household linens. This would be condoned as an acceptably ladylike form of business venture.

"SO, OCTAVIA," said Drusilla to her crippled sister that night in the kitchen, after they had settled to their handwork while Missy buried her head in a book, "we had better spend next week making sure everything is fit for Aurelia and Alicia to see. Missy, since you have the lightest hand with flour, you will make the refreshments. We'll have little pikelets with jam and cream, some little butterfly cakes, and a sour-apple tart cooked with cloves."

This being sorted out to Drusilla's satisfaction, she then passed to a spicier topic, the advent of John Smith. For once the conversation attracted Missy more than her book did, though she pretended to continue reading, and when she went to bed, she carried this additional information with her to integrate and correlate with what Una had told her.

Why shouldn't his real name be John Smith? Of course the basis for all the Hurlingford suspicion was his acquisition of the valley. Well, John Smith, good for you! thought Missy. It's high time someone shook up the Hurlingfords. She fell asleep smiling.

The fuss of preparation that preceded the visit of the two Marshall ladies was largely futile, for the delicacies Missy had taken such pains to prepare were not eaten by the ladies for whom they were intended. Alicia watched her figure, as she phrased it, and so too these days did her mother, who wanted to cut a figure of high fashion at her daughter's wedding. However, the amount of linen displayed for Aurelia and Alicia staggered them, and after a pleasant hour spent discussing the final choices Aurelia pressed not one but two hundred pounds into Drusilla's reluctant hand.

"No arguments, if you please!" she said, at her most imperious. "Alicia is getting a bargain."

"I think, Octavia," said Drusilla later, after the visitors had driven off in their chauffeured motorcar, "that now we can all afford new dresses for Alicia's wedding. A lilac crepe for me, with a beaded bodice—I have just the right beads put by! And I think you might purchase that powder-blue silk you so admired in Herbert's material department, don't you? Missy could tat up some lace insertions for the neck and sleeves—very smart!" Drusilla stopped to ponder, brow furrowed, looking at her dusky daughter. "You're the really difficult one, Missy. You're too dark for pale colors, so I think it will have to be . . ."

Oh, let it not be brown! prayed Missy. I want a *scarlet* dress! A lace dress in the sort of red that makes your eyes swim when you look at it, that's what I want!

"Brown," Drusilla finished at last, and sighed. "The truth of the matter is, Missy, that no other color *becomes* you half so well as brown! In pastels you look sick, in black you look jaundiced, and in navy you are at death's door."

Missy said not a word, the logic of this being inarguable, and not knowing how much her docility pained Drusilla, who would have welcomed a suggestion at least—though of course scarlet would not have been countenanced under any circumstances. It was the color of tarts and trollops, fully as much as brown was the color of the respectable poor.

However, nothing could keep Drusilla's spirits oppressed tonight. "In fact," she said, "I think we can all have new boots as well. Oh, what a dash we're going to cut at the wedding!"

"Shoes," said Missy suddenly. "Mother, please! Let us have shoes—pretty, dainty shoes with bows on the front."

It is possible that Drusilla may have considered the idea, but Missy's cry from the heart was smothered immediately by Octavia, who in her invalidish way did quite a lot of the ruling at the house called Missalonghi.

"Living out at the end of Gordon Road?" Octavia snorted. "You're not right in the head, girl! Just how long do you think shoes would last in the dust and the mud? Boots are what we must have—good, sturdy boots with good, sturdy, thick heels."

And that was that.

BY MONDAY life had returned to normal at Missalonghi, so Missy was allowed to take her habitual walk to the lending library in Byron. Of course it wasn't all selfish pleasure; she went armed with two empty shopping bags—one for either hand to balance the load—and she did the week's marketing as well.

Quiescent for a week, the stitch in Missy's side came back now in full force. Odd that it only seemed to bother her on long walks. And it was painful, so wretchedly painful!

Today her purse was fat, for Missy had been commissioned to buy material at Herbert Hurlingford's clothing emporium. Missy hated Uncle Herbert's shop, for he staffed it exclusively with young men—sons or grandsons, naturally; even if one were purchasing stays or underdrawers, one had to suffer the attentions of a sniggering cad who found his task exquisitely funny.

As she stood watching James Hurlingford bring down the bolts she indicated, Missy wondered what he would have done had she made a request for scarlet lace—not that the clothing emporium stocked such a fabric. So along with the lilac crepe and the powder-blue silk, Missy bought a length of very beautiful delustered satin in the shade known as snuff. Had the material been any other color she would have loved it, but since it was brown, it might as well have been jute sacking. Every dress Missy had ever owned had been brown; it was such a serviceable color: never showed the dirt, never went in or out of fashion, never faded.

"New dresses for the wedding?" asked James archly. "Let's see, now, how about a weeny game of guessies? The crepe is for Auntie Drusie, and the silk is for Auntie Octie, and the satin—the *brown* satin—must therefore be for little brown cousin Missy!"

Her brain must still have been filled with the image of that impossible scarlet lace dress, for quite suddenly Missy saw nothing but scarlet, and out of the recesses of her memory she dredged the only insulting phrase she knew.

"Oh, go bite your bum, James!" she snapped.

He could not have been more shocked had his wooden dress dummy come to life and kissed him, and he measured and he cut with a hitherto unknown alacrity, thereby unintentionally giving each lady an extra yard of fabric, and he couldn't get Missy out of the shop fast enough.

The library was only two doors down, so when Missy went in she was still flying the flags of her anger in her cheeks, and she banged the door after her.

Una looked up, startled, and began to laugh. "Darling, you look absolutely splendid! In a rage, are we?"

Missy took a couple of deep breaths to calm down. "Oh, just my cousin James Hurlingford. I told him to go bite his bum."

"Good for you! Time someone told him." Una giggled.

Her burst of merriment did the trick, and Missy found herself able to laugh too. "Dear oh dear, it wasn't very ladylike of me, was it?" she asked, sounding more surprised than horrified. "I don't know what came over me!"

The radiant face turned up to her looked suddenly sly, not the slyness of dishonesty but the slyness of someone fairylike or fey. "Straws and camels," intoned Una, "eyes of needles and days of dogs. There's a lot in you, Missy Wright, that you don't even know is there." She sat back and hummed like a gleeful naughty child. "But it's started now, and it can't be stopped."

Out came the story of the scarlet lace dress, the terrible longing to wear something other than brown and the defeat of having to admit that no other color suited her. Una listened sympathetically, her feyness quite vanished, and when Missy had got it all out of her system, Una looked her up and down deliberately.

"Scarlet *would* suit you beautifully," she said. "Oh, what a pity! Still, never mind, never mind." And she changed the subject. "I've saved another new novel for you—two pages into it, and I promise you won't even remember your red dress. It's all about a drab young woman who is utterly downtrodden by her family until the day she finds out she's dying of heart trouble. There's this chap she's been in love with for years, only of course he's engaged to someone else. So she takes the letter from the heart specialist telling her she's going to die to this young man, and she begs him to marry her rather than the other girl, because she's only got six months to live, and after she's dead he can marry the other girl, anyway. He's a bit of a wastrel, but he agrees to marry her. And they have six heavenly months together. He finds out that under her drab exterior she's an entrancing person, and her love for him reforms him completely. Then one day, when the sun is shining and the birds are singing, she dies in his arms. Oh, Missy, it's so sad! I cried for days."

"I'll take it," said Missy instantly. She paid up her debt, which made her feel a lot better, and tucked *The Troubled Heart* into the bottom of one of her shopping bags.

"I'll see you next Monday," said Una, waving good-bye.

As long as Missy walked it on her own, the five miles from Byron's shops to Missalonghi never seemed half so much. For as she walked she dreamed, fantasizing herself into roles and events and characters far beyond her real ken. Until Una had come to the library, these characters had all looked exactly like Alicia, and the antics they got up to revolved around hat shops or dress shops or tearooms of awesome gentility. Nowadays Missy's imagination had better grist to work on, and whatever the adventure might be, it bore far more resemblance to the latest novel Una had smuggled to her than to any aspect of Byron life.

But halfway home, where Gordon Road branched off from the long straggle of Noel Street, began her valley. At this point Missy always stopped daydreaming and looked about her instead. It was a beautiful day, as late winter days on the Blue Mountains can be when the wind takes time off to rest. Answering the lure of the valley, she lifted her face to the kindly sky and swelled her nostrils to take in the heady tang of the bush.

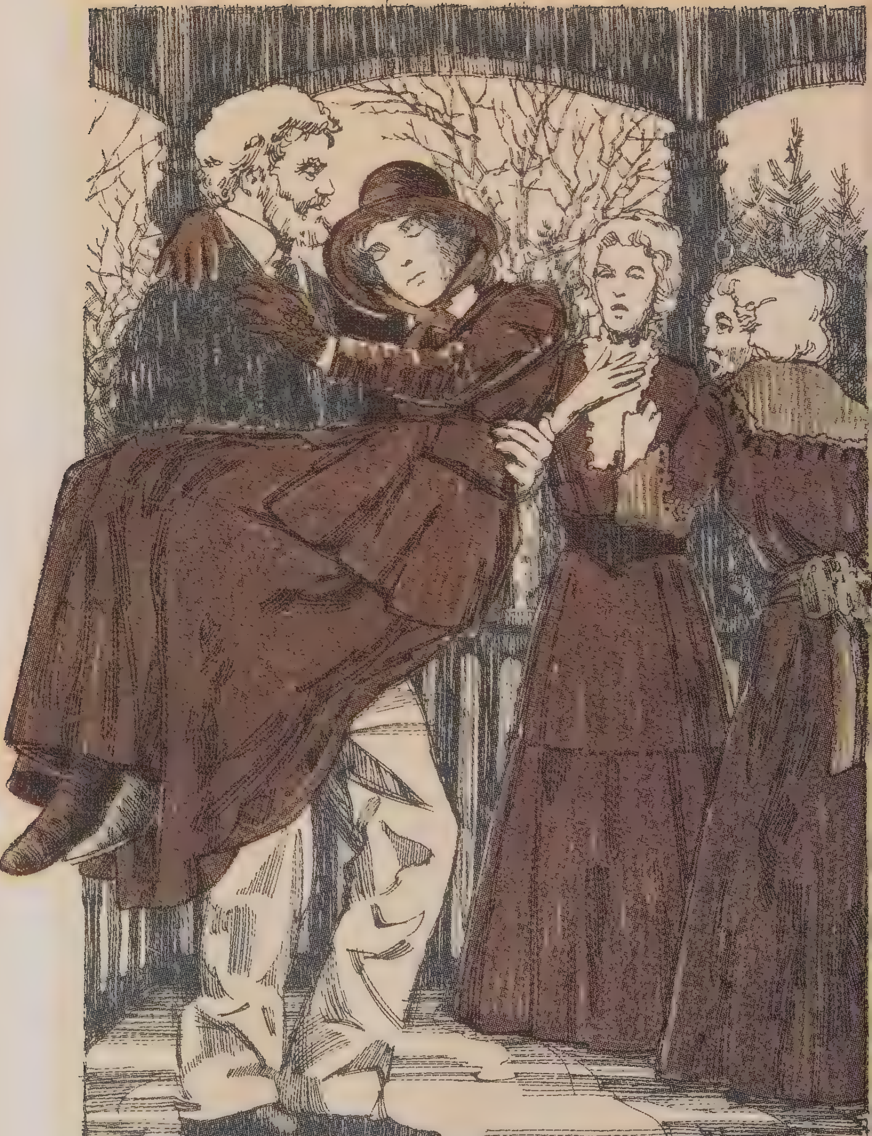
No one had ever produced a name for the valley, though from now on it would no doubt come to be known as John Smith's Valley. It was not very big, but it was perfect, a bowl some fifteen hundred feet lower than the ridge upon which Byron was built. In shape it was a symmetrical oval, one narrow, curving end lying just beyond Gordon Road and the far end some five miles away to the east, where its otherwise uninterrupted wall was dramatically broken by a chasm through which flowed its nameless river. All the way around the margin was a stunning drop of dull orange sandstone cliff, and below this a tree-covered skirt of fallen rock curved down to the river. And the valley was, looking across it, stuffed with lush, native forest, a blue ocean of gums that sighed and whispered ceaselessly.

The only way down to the valley's floor was a terrifyingly steep track just wide enough for a large wagon, a track that emerged onto the top of the rim just beyond Missalonghi, at the end of Gordon Road. Fifty years earlier someone had made the track in order to plunder the rain forest below of its massive cedars and turpentines, but after a whole team of oxen, their driver, two loggers, and a dray bearing a mighty tree trunk had gone over the edge, the plundering had ceased abruptly. There were easier forests to log. And gradually the track had been forgotten.

That wretched stitch came back just as Missy rounded the corner not far from Missalonghi, and ten seconds later the pain struck at her chest like a blow from an axe. She faltered and dropped her loaded shopping bags, her arms flying up to pluck at this terrifying agony; then she saw the neat hedge of Missalonghi through her terror and ran for home. At precisely the same moment, John Smith rounded the corner from its other side, striding along with his head down in thought.

Only ten yards short of the gate in the hedge, she pitched headlong. No one inside Missalonghi saw, for it was about five o'clock, and the rolling chords of Drusilla's organ were erupting into the outside air.

But John Smith saw, and came running. His first thought was that the odd little soul had tripped after bolting to escape meeting him, but when he knelt and turned her face upward, one look at her gray skin and sweat-soaked brow told him differently. He half sat her against his thigh, rubbing her back helplessly, wishing he



knew of some way to force air into her lungs. She put up her hands to clutch at his arm, where it lay lightly across her chest; the whole of her body was heaving with the fight to breathe, and her eyes were turned up to his. Caught, mesmerized, watching horror and bewilderment and pain pass through those eyes, he began to think she was going to die.

Then, with startling swiftness, the gray color faded, a healthier tinge crept into her skin, and her hands relaxed on his arm.

"Please!" she gasped, struggling to rise.

He got to his feet at once, slipped his arms under her, and scooped her up. Though he had no idea where she lived, there must surely be some assistance in the dingy house behind the hedge, so he carried her through the gate and down the path, calling for help at the top of his voice and praying he would be heard above the bellowing of the organ.

Apparently he was heard, for two women came out of the house immediately. There was no nonsense about them, which he appreciated deeply; they wordlessly ushered him into the parlor with his burden.

"Brandy," said Drusilla curtly, bending to loosen her daughter's clothes. She wore no stays, having no need of them, but her dress was tightly belted and high to the neck.

"Do you have a telephone?" asked John Smith.

"I'm afraid not."

"Then if you give me directions, I'll go for the doctor."

"The corner of Byron and Noel, Dr. Neville Hurlingford," said Drusilla. "Tell him it's Missy—she's my daughter."

He went immediately, leaving Drusilla and Octavia to administer the brandy every prudent household kept in the cupboard.

By the time Dr. Neville Hurlingford arrived some sixty minutes later, Missy had almost fully recovered and was resting in her room. John Smith did not return with him.

"Very puzzling," said Dr. Hurlingford to Drusilla. "Has she had any other attack like it?"

"Not that we know of," said Drusilla soberly. "Is it her heart?"

"I honestly don't know. From what Smith told me, it's possible." But he sounded doubtful. "I'll go in and see her now."

Missy was lying in her narrow little bed with her eyes closed, but the moment she heard Dr. Hurlingford's unfamiliar step she opened them and looked at him, then unaccountably seemed disappointed.

"Well now, Missy," he said, sitting gingerly alongside her. "What happened, eh?"

Drusilla and Octavia hovered in the background; he would dearly have liked to dismiss them, sensing that their presence inhibited Missy, but decency and convention forbade it. In all of Missy's life he had only seen her two or three times, so he knew only the little about her that everyone knew—she was the sole dark-haired Hurlingford in history, and she had been doomed to spinsterhood before she was into her teens.

"I don't know what happened," lied Missy.

"Come now, you must remember something."

"I got short of breath and fainted, I suppose."

"That's not what Mr. Smith says."

"Then Mr. Smith is wrong. . . . Where is he? Is he here?"

"Did you experience any pain?" pressed Dr. Hurlingford, not satisfied, and not bothering to answer Missy's question.

A ghastly vision of herself reduced to the status of a chronic invalid rose up in Missy's mind: the awful additional monetary burden she would become, the guilt she would in consequence feel every day of her bed-bound life, the impossibility of ever getting away on her own to walk past her valley into Byron and the library—no, it could not be borne!

"I had no pain at all," she insisted.

Dr. Hurlingford looked as if he didn't believe her, but for a Hurlingford he was fairly perceptive. So he forbore to press the poor girl further, merely got out his old-fashioned, funnel-shaped stethoscope and listened to her heart, which was beating quite normally, and to her lungs, which were clear.

"Today is Monday. You had better come and see me on Friday," he said as he rose. He patted Missy reassuringly on top of her head and then walked into the hall, where Drusilla, now alone, lurked in wait.

"I can't find anything wrong," he said to her. "But mind she sees me on Friday, and if anything else happens in the meantime, send for me at once."

"No medicine?"

"My dear Drusilla, how can I prescribe medicine for a mystery illness? She's as skinny as a wormy cow, but she seems healthy enough. Just leave her alone, let her sleep for now, and give her plenty of good, nourishing food."

With that Drusilla had to be satisfied. She ushered her uncle the doctor out the door, peeped back into Missy's room, saw that Missy was asleep, and retreated to the kitchen, where a shaken Octavia was sitting at the table polishing off a cup of tea.

At dinnertime Drusilla brought Missy a huge bowl of beef-and-barley broth and sat by the bed until she managed to struggle through it; but after that Missy was left mercifully alone. The long sleep of the earlier part of the evening had left her wakeful, though, so she settled in to think. About the pain and what it might mean. About John Smith. About the future. Between the pain and the future—two deserts of appalling dreariness—John Smith stood lit up and glorious.

Such a nice man! Interesting too. How easily he had lifted her and carried her inside. The recent avalanche of secondhand knowledge from Una's smuggled novels was suddenly of genuine benefit; Missy understood that she was in love at last. But hope was not present at all in the sweet train of thought this realization of love triggered. The Alicias of this world might scheme and plot to attain their ends, but the Missys could not. The Missys didn't know enough about men, and the smidgin they did know lay in the realm of generality. All men had choices and were free. All men had power. All men were untouchable, even jailbirds. Not that she believed John Smith was really a jailbird; Una had known him during her years in Sydney, and presumably that meant he had moved at least on the fringes of the highest society.

Oh, but he had been nice to her! Nice to a nonentity like Missy Wright. Even through that hideous and frightening pain she had been conscious of his presence, felt too some strange passage of strength from him to her that had, she fancied, tossed death aside like so much chaff.

John Smith, she thought, if I were only young and pretty, you would stand no more chance of escaping me than poor Little Willie did Alicia! I would chase you remorselessly until I caught you. Wherever you went, there I would be, with my best foot forward to trip you up. And once I had you in my toils, I would love you so much and so well that you would never, never want to get away from me.

John Smith came in person the next day to inquire after Missy, but Drusilla dealt with him at the front door and did not permit him sight or sound of Missy. It was merely a courtesy call, so Drusilla thanked him nicely, but not profusely, and then stood watching as he strode off down the path, whistling a tune.

"Fancy that!" said Octavia, coming out of the parlor, where she had been hiding to watch John Smith through a lifted curtain edge. "Are you going to tell Missy he called?"

"Why?" asked Drusilla, surprised.

"Oh, well . . ."

"My dear Octavia, you sound as if you've been reading those penny-dreadful romances Missy's been bringing home from the library recently!"

"*Has* she?"

Drusilla laughed. "You know, until I realized what a dither she was in trying to hide the covers of her books, I'd forgotten all about our original rule. After all, it was fifteen years ago! And I thought, Why shouldn't Missy read romances if she wants?"

"Are you going to tell her so?" Octavia asked.

"Certainly not! If I did that, it would remove most of her pleasure, you know. Pure freedom to read them would only give her sufficient detachment to see how dreadful they are." Drusilla frowned. "What intrigues me is how Missy managed to persuade Livilla of all people to let her borrow them. Still, I see it as a wee bit of defiance, and that gives me hope that there's some starch in Missy's backbone after all."

Octavia sniffed. "I can't see anything laudable about a sort of defiance that necessitates her becoming underhanded!"

A small sound escaped Drusilla's lips, but then she smiled, shrugged, and led the way into the kitchen.

DRUSILLA accompanied Missy to the doctor the following Friday morning. The waiting room, dim and fusty, was empty. Mrs. Neville Hurlingford, who did service as her husband's nurse, ushered them in with a cheery word, and a moment later the doctor poked his head around his consulting-room door.

"Come in, Missy. No, Drusilla, you can stay there and visit with my wife."

Missy went in, sat down, and waited warily, her guard up.

He commenced with a frontal attack. "I do not believe you were merely short of breath," he said. "There had to be pain, and I want to hear all about it, and no nonsense."

Missy gave in and told him about the stitch in her left side, the way it only bothered her on long walks if she hurried and the way it had ushered in that sudden, terrifying onslaught of severe pain and breathlessness.

So he examined her again, and afterward sighed. "I can find absolutely nothing the matter with you," he said. "When I examined you last Monday, there were no signs of heart trouble, and today is the same. However, just to make sure, I'm going to send you to a specialist in Sydney. If I can arrange an appointment, would you like to go down with Alicia on her weekly Tuesday trip to the city? It would save your mother having to go."

Was there an understanding twinkle in his eyes? Missy wasn't sure, but she looked at him gratefully all the same. "Thank you, I'd like to go with Alicia."

In fact, Friday was a very good day, for in the afternoon Una drove up to Missalonghi in Livilla's horse-and-sulky, and she had half a dozen novels with her, discreetly wrapped in brown paper.

"I didn't even know you were ill until Mrs. Neville Hurlingford told me this morning in the library," she said, sitting down in the parlor.

Neither Drusilla nor Octavia offered to let the two young women talk alone, not because they were consciously spoilsporting, but because they were always starved for company, especially when the company took the form of a brand-new face. Such a lovely face too! Her arrival pleased Drusilla particularly, since it answered the vexing question as to how Missy was suddenly managing to borrow novels.

"Thank you for the books," said Missy, smiling at her friend. "The last one I brought home is nearly worn out."

"Did you enjoy it?" asked Una.

"Oh, very much!" As indeed she had; its dying heroine with her dicky heart could not have come at a more appropriate moment. Admittedly, the heroine actually had managed to die in her beloved's arms, but she, Missy, had had the good fortune *almost* to die in her beloved's arms.

Una's manners were perfect. By the time she had partaken of a cup of tea and some plain homemade biscuits, she had won Drusilla and Octavia over completely. To have no better fare to offer was humiliating, but Una's appreciation turned the despised biscuits into an inspired guess as to what the visitor really liked.

"Oh, I get so tired of cream cakes and asparagus rolls!" she exclaimed, smiling with dazzling effect at her hostesses. "How clever of you! These little biscuits are delicious, and *so* much better for my digestion! Most Byron ladies swamp one in oceans of jam and cream, and as a guest it is of course impossible to refuse refreshments without offending."

"What a lovely person," said Drusilla after Una had gone.

"Delightful," agreed Octavia.

"She may come again," said Drusilla to Missy.

"Anytime," said Octavia, who had made the biscuits.

ON SUNDAY afternoon Missy announced that she was going for a walk in the bush. So calm and decided was her tone that for a moment her mother just stared at her, at a loss.

"A walk?" she asked at last. "In the *bush?* Most definitely not! You don't know who you might meet."

"I won't meet anyone," said Missy patiently. "There has never been any kind of prowler or molester of women in Byron."

She walked out of the house, wearing neither overcoat nor scarf.

Drusilla and Octavia looked at each other.

"I hope her brain's not affected," said Octavia dolefully.

So, secretly, did Drusilla, but aloud she said stoutly, "At least you can't call this bit of defiance *underhanded!*"

In the meantime Missy had let herself out the front gate and turned left instead of right, down to where Gordon Road dwindled to two faint wheel marks meandering into the heart of the bush. It was a clear day and the sun was warm. Spring had arrived; even high up in the Blue Mountains it came early.

Missy had decided to find the road leading into the steep valley. When at last she stumbled upon the spot, she could see the logic behind the site, for a gargantuan landslide had strewn boulders and rocks in a kind of ramp from top to bottom of the valley's formidable cliff. Standing at the commencement of the track, she could just glimpse it twisting back and forth across the landslide in a series of descending zigzags.

She was far too timid to venture down, not from fear of falling, but from fear of walking into John Smith's lair. Instead, she struck off into the bush on top of the ridge, along a narrow path that might have been made by animals going to water. And sure enough, as time went by, a sound of running water gradually overpowered the plaintive sound of the rustling gum trees. Louder and louder was the water, until it became a bewildering roar; but when she came upon the stream, it offered her no answer, for though it was quite deep and wide, it was sliding along between its ferny banks without a flurry.

She turned to the right and followed the river, inside her dream of enchantment at last. The sun glanced off the surface of the water in a thousand sparks of light, and the ferns dripped tiny droplets, and brilliant parrots wheeled from the trees of one bank to the trees of the other.

Suddenly the river vanished. It just fell away into nothing, a smoothly curving edge. Gasping, Missy drew back quickly, understanding the roar. Working cautiously along the brink, she came to a place where a great rock jutted far out over the cliff. And there, right on its end, legs dangling into nothingness, she sat to watch the waterfall in awe. Its bottom she could not discover, only the beautiful untidy tangle of its flight through the windy air, and a rainbow against a mossy place on the cliff behind it.

Several hours slipped away as easily as the water. The sun left that part of the ridge. She began to shiver; time to go home to Missalonghi.

And then, where her path joined the road leading down into John Smith's valley, Missy met John Smith himself. He was driving his cart from the direction of Byron, and she saw that the cart was laden with tools and crates and iron machinery.

He pulled up at once and jumped down, smiling broadly. "Hello!" he said. "Feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you."

"I'm glad to catch you like this. I was beginning to wonder if you were still in the land of the living. Your mother assured me you were when I called, but she wouldn't let me see for myself."

"You came to see how I was?"

"Yes, last Tuesday."

"Oh, thank you for that!" she said with fervor.

His brows rose, but he didn't attempt to quiz her. Instead, he left his conveyance where it was, and turned to walk back with her toward Missalonghi.

"I take it there was nothing serious wrong?" he asked after some minutes during which they just paced along together.

"I don't know," said Missy. "I have to see a doctor in Sydney quite urgently. A *heart* specialist, I believe." Now why did she put it like that?

"Oh," he said, at a loss.

"Whereabouts exactly do you live, Mr. Smith?" she asked, to change the subject.

"Well, farther around in the direction you've just come from is a waterfall," he said. "There's an old logger's hut near the bottom of it, and I'm camping in that for the time being. But I'm starting to build a house a bit closer to the waterfall itself, out of sandstone blocks I'm quarrying on the site. I've just been down to Sydney to pick up an engine to drive a big saw."

She heaved a big unconscious sigh. "Oh, how I envy you!"

He stared down at her curiously. "That's an odd thing for a woman to say."

"Is it?"

"Women usually don't like being cut off from shops and houses and other women." His tone was hard.

"You're probably right for the most part," she said thoughtfully, "but in that sense I don't really count as a woman. The peace, the freedom, the isolation—I dream of them!"

The end of the track came into sight and so did the faded red corrugated-iron roof of Missalonghi.

"Do you do all your shopping in Sydney?" she asked, for something to say, then chastised herself for asking a silly question; hadn't she met him first in Uncle Maxwell's?

"I do when I can," he said. "It's preferable to Byron. I've never encountered a place so full of nosey parkers."

Missy grinned. "Try not to blame them too much, Mr. Smith. Not only are you a novelty, but you've also stolen what they have always regarded as their exclusive property, even if they never thought about it or wanted it."

He burst out laughing. "My valley, you mean? They could have bought it; the sale wasn't secret—it was advertised in the papers. But they're just not as smart as they think they are, that's all."

"You must feel like a king down there."

"I do, Miss Wright." And he smiled at her, tipped his battered bushman's hat, turned, and walked away.

Missy floated the rest of the way home, in perfect time to milk the cow. Neither Drusilla nor Octavia made reference to her bush walk, Drusilla because she had been more pleased at the display of independence than worried about the outcome, and Octavia because she had convinced herself that Missy's cerebral processes were being affected by whatever ailed her.

In fact, shortly after she'd gone, the two ladies left at Missalonghi had had a small tiff.

"I have been thinking ever since Missy had her turn," Drusilla said majestically. "And I have begun to see that a whole lifetime's exposure to my strength of character has not been good for Missy. I make the decisions about everything, and it is her nature to acquiesce without a fuss. So for far too long I have gone on making her decisions. I shall do so no longer."

"Rubbish!" snapped Octavia. "The girl's got no sense! Shoes instead of boots! Romances! Bush walks! It is my opinion that you must be more severe in future, not less."

Drusilla sighed. "When we were young women, Octavia, we lacked for nothing. Father was a very warm man. And no matter how hard life has been, at least you and I are able to look back and remember the pleasure of pretty shoes, pretty dresses, coming-out parties, *gaiety*. Whereas Missy has never worn a pair of pretty shoes or a pretty dress. I'm not castigating myself for that, but when I thought she might be going to die, well, I decided I was going to give her whatever I could. Shoes, of course, I cannot afford, especially if there are going to be heavy doctor's bills. But if she wants to walk in the bush or read romances, she may."

"Rubbish, rubbish, rubbish! You must go on as you have in the past. Missy needs strong direction."

And from that viewpoint Drusilla could not budge her.

Unaware of her mother's soul-searching, Missy decided she had better not read one of the new novels after dinner; she elected to tat instead.

"Aunt Octavia," she said, fingers flying, "how much lace do you want on your new dress? Is this going to be enough?"

Octavia held out her knobby hand, and Missy deposited the bunched-up lace in it.

"Oh, Missy, it is beautiful!" breathed Octavia as she spread out each piece on her lap. "Drusilla, do look!"

Drusilla plucked out a scrap and held it up to the weak light bulb. "Yes, it is beautiful, and for what I had originally planned it's enough. But I'd like to set in some around the hem of the overskirt—*so* fashionable! Missy, would you mind doing so much extra work on Octavia's dress? Do be frank if you'd rather not."

Missy looked blank; in all her life her mother had never deferred to her before, nor stopped to think whether what she asked was excessive. Of course! It was the heart trouble! How amazing! "I don't mind in the least," she said quickly.

Octavia beamed. "Oh, thank you!" Her face puckered. "If only I might help you with the sewing, Drusilla. It's so much work for you." Octavia could not hold an instrument so fine as a needle.

Drusilla looked at the heap of lilac crepe in her lap and sighed. "Don't worry, Octavia. Missy does all the fiddly bits like buttonholes and hems and plackets. But I do admit it would be wonderful to have a Singer sewing machine."

That night in bed Missy lay in the darkness and remembered the details of the loveliest afternoon of her entire life. For not only had he said hello to her, he had climbed down from his cart and actually chosen to walk along with her, chatting to her as if she were a friend rather than a member of that tiresome gang called Hurlingford. How nice he had looked. Homespun but nice. He smelled not of stale sweat, like so many of the oh-so-respectable Hurlingford men, but of sweet, expensive soap. And his hands might be toil roughened, but they were clean, even beneath the nails. A prideful and scrupulous man, John Smith.

Best of all she liked his eyes—such a translucent golden brown and so laughing. She couldn't, *wouldn't* believe any of the tales hinting at dishonesty or baseness. Instead, she would have staked her life upon his integrity.

Oh, John Smith, I do love you! And I thank you from the bottom of my heart for coming back to Missalonghi to see how I did.

WITH only a month left until her wedding, Alicia Marshall came day by day closer to the perfect manifestation of her long and glorious blossoming, and she meant to enjoy that final month to the top of her bent. Nothing would be allowed to put a blight on her plans, not even her father's business worries. It seemed the upper echelons of the Byron Bottle Company were becoming alarmed about some mysterious movements in stock shares.

Alicia's bridal party was scheduled for Thursday. This was not a humble affair, where modest kitchen gifts and girlish chatter prevailed; it was instead a formal reception for Alicia's female relatives of all ages, an occasion upon which everyone would have an opportunity to see and hear what would be expected of them on the great day. During the course of the festivities Alicia intended to announce the names of her bridesmaids, and show the designs and fabrics for the bridal party and the church decor.

Of course Drusilla came, and brought Missy with her; poor Octavia, dying to go, was obliged at the last moment to remain behind in all her best clothes, as Aurelia had forgotten to arrange the promised conveyance for the ladies of Missalonghi. Drusilla wore her brown grosgrain. Missy wore her brown linen, and on her head was the old sailor hat she had been forced to don on every occasion demanding a hat for the last fifteen years.

Alicia was looking stunning in a delicate apricot crepe dress as she greeted her guests. Over a hundred women had been invited to the party. They wandered about the house in little clutches, catching sight of familiar faces and catching up on gossip. Then at four o'clock they settled like roosting hens in the ballroom, where they partook of a magnificent tea of scones with jam and cream, petits fours, cucumber sandwiches, asparagus cornucopias, éclairs, cream buns, and deliciously gooey napoleons.

Hurlingford women were traditionally fair and traditionally tall and traditionally incapable of frank speech. This was the first occasion of its kind Missy had ever been invited to, probably because it would have been impolite not to invite her when so many women less closely related were coming. Somehow, in church on Sunday the awesome presence of Hurlingford women en masse was watered down by the presence of a roughly equal number of Hurlingford men. But here in Aunt Aurelia's ballroom the breed was undiluted and overwhelming.

Drusilla went off to chat with Augusta and Antonia, the sisters she saw least of. Left very much to her own devices, Missy looked around for Una. She spied Aunt Livilla but no Una. How odd!

"I don't see Una here today," said Missy to Alicia when that ravishing creature drifted by with a condescending smile.

"Who?" asked Alicia, stopping.

"Una—Aunt Livilla's cousin—she works in the library."

"Silly girl, there's no Hurlingford by that name in Byron," said Alicia, who had never been known to read a book. And off she went to spread her glorious presence across the gathering.

At which point the penny dropped. Of course! Una was *divorced!* An unheard-of sin! Stirred to the extent of providing a roof over her cousin's head Aunt Livilla might have been, but her humanitarian instincts would never extend to allowing that *divorced* cousin to enter Byron society. Come to think of it, on the rare occasions since Una's advent that Missy had found Aunt Livilla in the library, Livilla had never even mentioned Una's name.

Drusilla bustled up, her sister Cornelia in tow. "Oh, is this not splendid?" she asked.

"Very splendid," said Missy, sitting down on a sofa.

Drusilla and Cornelia sat down with her, replete with at least one specimen from every kind of delicacy offered at the buffet.

"So kind! So considerate! Dear Alicia!" waffled Cornelia, who regarded it as a great privilege to be permitted to work for a pittance as Alicia's sales dame, and had no idea how cynically Alicia traded on her gratitude.

"Hush!" breathed Drusilla. "Alicia is going to speak."

Alicia spoke, cheeks glowing, eyes sparkling like bleached aquamarines. The names of the ten bridesmaids were greeted with squeals and claps; the chief bridesmaid fainted clean away from the honor of it and had to be revived with smelling salts. According to Alicia, the dresses for her attendants were to be paired in five shades of pink, so that when the white-clad bride stood at the altar, she would be flanked on either side by five attendants who gradually shaded from palest pink at the bride's end to deep cyclamen pink at the farthest end.

"We are all very nearly the same height, all very fair," explained Alicia. "I think the effect will be remarkable."

"Is it not a brilliant concept?" whispered Cornelia, privileged to have been a party to the preliminary planning of the entire bridal. "Alicia's train will be of Alençon lace, twenty feet long."

"Magnificent," sighed Drusilla, remembering that the train on her own wedding gown had been of lace, and even longer, but deciding not to say so.

"I notice Alicia has kept her choice to virgins only," said Missy, whose stitch in her side had been bothering her ever since the seven-mile walk from Missalonghi and now was growing worse. To keep her mind off the pain she started to talk. "Very orthodox of her," she continued, "but I'm *definitely* a virgin, and I didn't get picked."

"Sh!" hissed Drusilla.

In the meantime Alicia had passed to the subject of flowers, and was informing her enthralled audience that every bouquet would consist of dozens of pink orchids that were coming down in chilled boxes on the Brisbane train.

"Orchids! How ostentatiously vulgar!" said Missy loudly.

"Sh!" hissed Drusilla again.

At this moment Alicia swept down upon them, laughing, glowing, her head full of limelight and her hands full of bridal sketches and swatches of fabric.

"It's such a pity you're so dark and so short, Missy," she said, very prettily. "I would have liked to ask you, but you must see that you wouldn't fit in as a bridesmaid."

"Well, I think it's a pity that *you're* not dark and short," said Missy, equally prettily. "With everyone around you of similar height and coloring and all that gradual shading of pink, you're going to fade into the wallpaper."

Alicia gasped. Drusilla gasped. Cornelia gasped.

Missy was gone before her audience managed to regain its breath; when it did, Drusilla was forced to hide a smile and turn a deliberately deaf ear to Alicia's demand that Missy must be fetched back to apologize. Served Alicia right! Why couldn't she have been kind just this once, marred her perfect bridal group by including poor Missy in it?

Just outside the front door of Mon Repos, the awful pain and airlessness struck. Deciding she would rather die in decent seclusion, Missy darted around the side of the house and into a large clump of rhododendrons beneath one of the windows; she half sat, half lay, with her back against the house. The pain was unbearable. She willed herself not to die until she could die in John Smith's arms, like the girl in *The Troubled Heart*.

After a little while the pain began to recede. She rolled over onto her knees and started to get up. That was when she overheard voices coming from the window just above her head.

"Did you ever see such a monstrosity of a hat?" asked a voice Missy recognized as belonging to Aunt Augusta's youngest daughter, Lavinia; of course Lavinia was a bridesmaid.

"All too often, in church every Sunday, to be exact," said Alicia's tonelessly harsh voice. "Though I think the person underneath the hat is a far worse monstrosity."

"She's so *drab!*" came a third voice, belonging to the chief bridesmaid, Aunt Antonia's daughter Marcia. "Honestly, you're according her far too much importance by calling her a monstrosity. Nonentity is a much better word for Missy Wright."

"Do we really care about her one way or another?" asked a more distant cousin called Portia.

"Due to the fact that her mother is my mother's favorite sister, Portia, I'm afraid I have to," declared Alicia. "But I can tell you that I try never to be at home on Saturday mornings, when Auntie Drusie comes to gorge herself! Mama has cook make two dozen fairy cakes, and by the time Auntie Drusie has gone, so have the fairy cakes, every last one." Alicia produced a brittle laugh. "It's become a regular joke in our house, even among the servants."

"A pity one cannot have people condemned the way one can have houses condemned," said another voice, a mere fourth or fifth cousin, by name of Junia.

"In this day and age, Junia, we are too kind for that," said Alicia. "Therefore we must all go on putting up with Auntie Drusie and Auntie Octie and cousin Missy and Auntie Julie and Auntie Cornie and the rest of the spinster-widow brigade. Take my wedding. They will quite spoil it! Yet they must be invited. However, Mama did have a brain wave that will spare us from those hideous brown dresses. She bought my household linens from Auntie Drusie, and I will admit that they do remarkably fine and dainty work. Anyway, Mama's scheme succeeded, because Uncle Herbert slipped the word to us that Missy came in and got three dress lengths—lilac for Auntie Drusie and blue for Auntie Octie. Any guesses what color for cousin Missy?"

"*Brown!*" chorused every voice, with a gale of laughter.

"I have an idea!" cried Lavinia when the merriment ceased. "Why don't you give her one of your castoffs? I imagine anything amber or apricot would look all right on Missy."

At which point Missy managed to get herself on hands and knees, out of the rhododendrons, and onto the path. She crept on all fours until she was well clear of the window, then got to her feet and ran, tears pouring down her face.

She hadn't thought anything anybody might say about her could hurt, nor did it, really. What stabbed to the quick were the dreadful things Alicia and her friends had said about her mother and those poor spinster aunts, so decent and honorable and hard-working, so grateful for any attention yet so proud they would accept nothing they suspected might be charity. How dared Alicia speak of those admirable women so scathingly!

As Missy hurried through Byron with the stitch again burning in her side she found herself praying that the library would be open. Oh, how she needed Una tonight! But the premises were dark, and a sign on the door simply said CLOSED.

OCTAVIA was sitting in the kitchen of Missalonghi, changed back into her workaday clothes, with a stew simmering on the stove.

"Ah!" she said, laying her knitting aside when Missy walked in. "Did you have a nice time, dear? Is your mother with you?"

"I had a wretched time, so I left ahead of Mother," said Missy briefly, then seized the milk bucket and escaped.

The cow was waiting patiently outside; Missy stroked the velvety muzzle and looked into the big sweet brown eyes.

"Buttercup, you're *much* nicer than Alicia," she told it as she led it into the shed to the milking stall. Buttercup was the easiest cow to milk. Which of course was why its milk was so good; nice cows always gave nice milk.

Drusilla was home when Missy returned. It was customary to pour the milk into big flat pans on the shady side of the veranda; as she poured, she could hear her mother enthusiastically regaling her aunt with a description of Alicia's party.

Missy waited for her sins to be divulged, but her mother made no reference to them. Courage seeping back, Missy went inside. Ever since the heart trouble came on, it had become easier for her to assert herself, and apparently also easier for her mother to accept these signs of independence. Only it wasn't really the heart trouble that caused the change. It was Una. Yes, everything went back to Una's advent and Una's forthrightness. Una would always make sure people treated her with respect. And somehow this had rubbed off on such an unlikely pupil as Missy Wright.

When Missy walked in, Drusilla leaped up, beaming.

"Missy, you'll never guess!" she cried, reaching down to pluck a very large box off the floor. "As I was leaving the party Alicia gave me this for you to wear at her wedding. Look!"

Missy stood turned to stone while her mother unearthed an organdy dress from the box and held it up for inspection. It was a pale toffee shade, not tan and not yellow and not quite amber; those in the know would have put it at least five or six years out of date, but even so it was a gorgeous dress, and with extensive alterations it would suit Missy down to the ground.

"And the hat, look at the hat!" squeaked Drusilla, clawing a cartwheel of pale toffee straw from the box. "Did you ever see a more beautiful hat? Oh, dearest Missy, you shall have a pair of shoes, no matter how impractical they are!"

The stone dropped away from Missy's limbs at last; she stepped forward, arms extended to receive Alicia's bounty, and her mother placed dress and hat in them at once.

"I'll wear my new brown satin and my homemade hat and good, sturdy boots!" said Missy through her teeth, and took to her heels out the back door, masses of organdy billowing about her.

It was not yet fully dark; as she raced for the shed she could hear the frantic cries of her mother and aunt behind, but by the time they caught up with her, it was too late. The dress and hat were trampled beyond repair into the muck of the milking stall.

Drusilla was unspeakably hurt. "How could you, Missy? Just this once in your life, you had a chance to look and feel like a belle!"

Missy dusted her hands together in complete satisfaction. "You above all people ought to understand how I could, Mother," she said. "No one's pride is stiffer than yours; why deny me my share of that pride? Alicia is determined to have her wedding perfect down to the last guest, and I . . . I *spoiled* it! So she decided to make a silk purse out of Missy Wright, the sow's ear. Well, thank you very much, but I'd rather be my own sow's ear than any silk purse of Alicia's making! And so I shall tell her!"

AND so indeed she did tell her, the very next day. That memorable Friday morning Missy arrived at the front door of Mon Repos about ten o'clock, hampered by a large and exceedingly well-wrapped parcel, which she carried rather gingerly by a string loop. The butler ushered her to the small drawing room. It was rather full of people, so Missy sidled in unnoticed. Aunt Aurelia was there, and Uncle Edmund and Alicia and Ted and Randolph and the third Sir William and his son and heir, Little Willie. In fact, Missy found herself amid a general atmosphere of disaster. On impulse she shifted stealthily to a spot behind one of the potted Kentia palms Aunt Aurelia had placed everywhere.

"I don't understand it!" Edmund Marshall was saying. "How could so many shares escape us? *How?* And who the devil sold them and who the devil bought them?"

"As far as my agents can gather," said the third Sir William, "every share not held by a Hurlingford proper was bought up for many times its actual value, and then the mystery buyer began to make inroads on shares held by Hurlingfords. How or why, I don't know, but he managed to discover almost every Hurlingford not tied to Byron, and he made offers no one could refuse."

"It's ridiculous!" cried Ted. "For the sort of money he's been paying, there's absolutely no way he can ever recoup his outlay. I mean, the Byron Bottle Company is a very nice little enterprise, but it's not gold we're taking out of the ground. So why has he been paying these prices?"

"I agree," said Sir William, "but I can't give you an answer, because I just don't know it."

"Are we reduced to minority shareholders, Uncle Billy? Is that what you're trying to say?" asked Alicia.

"Good heavens, no, not yet!" cried Sir William; then with less confidence he added, "However, I admit it's going to be touch and go unless we can either stem the tide of shares we're losing or buy more ourselves."

"Aren't there any stray small shareholders living here in Byron whom we can get to first?" asked Randolph.

"A few, Hurlingfords on the distaff side mostly, and two or three of the old maids who accidentally inherited some shares. Naturally they've never been paid a dividend."

"How did you manage that, Uncle Billy?" asked Randolph.

Sir William snorted. "What do they know about business, silly old biddies like Cornelia and Julia and Octavia? I told them the shares were worthless because they belonged by rights in the male line."

"We'll have to acquire the old maids' shares now," said Edmund Marshall, looking gloomy. "Though, Billy, I must admit that I don't know how I'm going to find ready money."

"Why *buy* the shares?" asked Alicia, just the smallest tinge of contempt in her voice. "All you have to do is go to Auntie Cornie and Auntie Julie and Auntie Octie and *ask!* They'll hand them over without a murmur!"

"All right. We can do that with those three, and with Drusilla as well, I imagine. What on earth possessed Malcolm Hurlingford to leave shares to his daughters, I ask you? He always was soft over his girls." Sir William sighed impatiently. "A pretty pickle we're in! Even if, as Alicia says, the old biddies hand over their shares without a murmur, we've still got to deal with the various ne'er-do-wells and half Hurlingfords, who most certainly won't want to part with what shares they have for nothing."

"Who is to approach the aunties?" asked Ted.

"Alicia," said Sir William instantly. "Only not until a bit closer to her wedding, I think. That way she can hoodwink them into thinking they're giving her a wedding present."

As the meeting broke off, Missy slid out the door and came back inside very noisily. And they all noticed her at once, though none of them looked pleased to see her.

"What do you want?" asked Alicia rudely.

"I came to show you how I feel about your charity," said Missy, marching across the room and dumping her parcel on the table in front of Alicia. "There! Thank you, but no thank you."

Alicia stared at her much as she might have stared at something unpleasant she had almost stepped in. "Please yourself!"

"I intend to, from now on." She glanced up at Alicia with a puckish grin. "Go on, Alicia, open it! I dyed it brown just for you."

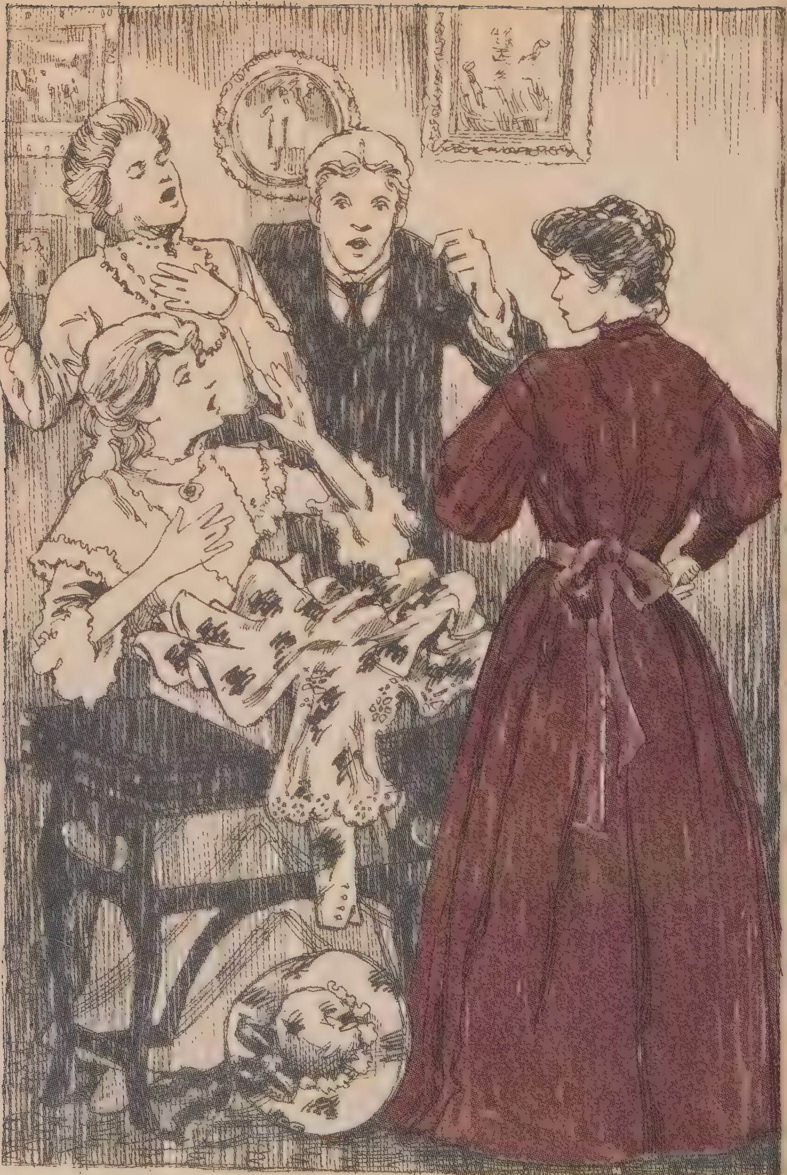
"You what?" Alicia sat down and began to fumble with the knots in the string, so Little Willie came to her rescue with his pocketknife. The wrapping then parted easily, and there lay the beautiful organdy dress and the ravishing hat, unspeakably smirched with what looked—and smelled—like fresh cow dung.

Alicia let out a squeak of horror that kept on growing and swelling until it became a long, thin screech; she jumped up from the table as her mother, father, brothers, uncle, and fiancé crowded around to see.

"You . . . you disgusting little trollop!" she snarled at the beaming Missy. "Get out of this house!"

"I'm on my way," said Missy.

Oh, how *satisfying* that had been! But as she walked back toward Byron, Missy's elation faded. Compared to the topic under discussion in the drawing room, the presentation of Alicia's violated clothing was picayune. Those poor women! Missy knew as little about business as her mother and aunts, but she was fully intelligent enough to have caught the drift of Sir William's words. She even knew of the shares, for Drusilla kept hers and Octavia's both in the small tin cashbox that lay inside her wardrobe.



How very despicable her rich relations were! Something must be done. But what? Missy debated carrying her tale home, then decided she would not be believed or, if believed, that her mother and aunts would still end in being bullied out of their just due.

The library was open today; Missy glanced through the window, expecting to see Aunt Livilla behind the desk, but there instead was Una, so she turned around and went in.

"Missy! What a treat! I didn't expect to see you today, darling," said Una, smiling as if she really did think it were a treat.

"I'm so angry!" cried Missy, and sat down on the hard chair provided for browsers, fanning herself with her hand.

"What's the matter?"

Suddenly reluctant to expose her close blood relations, Missy compromised with a lame, "Oh, nothing."

Una didn't attempt to probe. She just nodded and smiled, that lovely radiance emanating from skin and hair and nails.

"How about a cup of tea before the long hike home?" she asked, getting up.

A cup of tea assumed the proportions of a life-giving elixir. "Yes, please!" said Missy with fervor.

Una disappeared behind the last bookshelf at the back of the room, where in a small cubicle lay facilities for making tea.

To investigate the novels while she waited seemed like a good idea to Missy. As she inched along the shelf next to Aunt Livilla's desk, her eye encountered a familiar-looking sheaf of papers lying there. A packet of shares in the Byron Bottle Company.

Una emerged. "Kettle's on." Her eyes followed Missy's, then came to rest on Missy's face. "Isn't it lovely?" she asked.

"What?"

"The money that's being offered for Byron Bottle Company shares, of course. Ten pounds a pop! Unheard of! Wallace had a few shares of mine, you know, and when we separated he gave them back to me—said he didn't want anything that reminded him of the Hurlingfords. I only have ten shares, but I can definitely use a hundred quid at the moment, darling. And just between you and me, Auntie Livvie is a bit on the short side, so I've persuaded her to give me her twenty shares to sell too."

"How did Aunt Livilla manage to acquire shares?"

"Richard, her only beloved son, signed a few over to her when he couldn't pay her back in cash the time he borrowed from her. Poor Richard! He never can bet on the right horses."

"Has he got more shares?"

"Naturally. He's a male Hurlingford, darling. But I do believe he may have sold out completely, because it was Richard put me on to this godsend of a buyer."

"How can you sell someone else's shares?"

"With a power of attorney. See?" Una held up a stiff foolscap form. "You get it at the stationer's, like a will form. You fill it out, sign it, and whoever is giving you permission to act on her behalf signs it, and someone signs it as a witness."

"I see," said Missy. She sat down again. "Una, do you have an address for whoever is buying Byron Bottle shares?"

"Right here, darling, though I'm taking the whole kit and caboodle down to Sydney in person on Monday to sell them; it's safer. That's why I'm minding the library today, so I can have Monday off." She got up and went back to make the tea.

Missy thought hard. Why couldn't she, Missy, have a try at getting hold of the aunts' certificates before Alicia came asking for them? By the time Una came back with the tea tray, Missy had made up her mind. "Oh, thank you." She took her cup gratefully. "Una, is it imperative that you go to Sydney on Monday? Could you possibly make it Tuesday instead?"

"I don't see why not."

"I have an appointment with a Macquarie Street specialist next Tuesday morning," Missy explained carefully. "I was going with Alicia, but I don't think she's going to want my company, somehow. It's possible I may have some of these shares to sell, and if I could go with you, it would be easier. I've only been to Sydney twice, so I don't know the place."

"Oh, what fun! Tuesday it is." Una fairly glittered, so bright had the light in her become.

"I'll have to ask you for another favor, I'm afraid."

"Of course, darling. What?"

"Would you mind going next door to the stationer's and buying me four of these power of attorney forms? You see, if I go myself, Uncle Septimus is sure to want to know what I need power of attorney forms for, and the next thing he'll mention it to Uncle Billy, and . . . well, I'd rather keep my business to myself."

"I'll go the minute I finish my cup of tea, while you're here to mind the shop for me."

And so it was arranged, including Una's driving out to Missalonghi on Sunday afternoon at five o'clock to witness the signing of the forms. Luckily, this time Missy had her own little money purse with her, and luckily, it contained two shillings to pay Una when she returned from the stationer's.

"Thank you," said Missy, stowing the rolled-up forms in her shopping bag alongside *The Troubled Heart*, which she had decided to read again.

"I'll see you at Missalonghi on Sunday afternoon," said Una, accompanying Missy to the door, where she deposited a light kiss on Missy's unaccustomed cheek. "Chin up, girl; you can do it," she said, and pushed Missy out into the street.

"Mother," said Missy that evening as she sat in the kitchen with Drusilla and Octavia, "have you still got those Byron Bottle shares Grandfather left you and Aunt Octavia in his will?"

Drusilla looked up from her beading warily; though the altered pecking order was of her own making, she still found it difficult to accept that she was no longer the boss. And she had learned very quickly to spot the more subtle, oblique approach Missy employed, so that she knew something was in the wind now.

"Yes, I've still got them," she said.

Missy put her tatting in her lap and looked across at her mother very seriously. "If you had another hundred pounds, would you spend some of it to buy yourself a Singer sewing machine?"

"I would certainly be tempted."

"Then give me your shares in Byron Bottle and let me sell them for you. I can get you ten pounds a share in Sydney."

Both Drusilla and Octavia had ceased working.

"Missy dear, they're worthless," said Octavia gently.

"No, they are not worthless," said Missy. "You've been duped by Uncle Billy and the rest, is all. You should have been paid what's called a dividend upon them, because the Byron Bottle Company is an extremely prosperous concern."

"No, you're wrong!" insisted Octavia, shaking her head.

"I'm right. If you two and Aunt Cornelia and Aunt Julia had only taken yourselves off to a disinterested solicitor in Sydney years ago, you might be a lot richer than you are today."

"We could never go behind the menfolk's back, Missy," said Octavia. "They know better than we do, which is why they look after us and watch out for us. And they're *family!*"

"Don't I know it?" cried Missy from behind clenched teeth. "Aunt Octavia, your menfolk have been trading on the fact that they're family ever since the Hurlingfords began! They *use* you! They exploit you! When have we ever got a fair price from Uncle Maxwell for our produce? Do you honestly believe he can't afford to pay us more? He's as rich as Croesus! And when have you ever seen proof that Uncle Herbert actually did lose your money in an unlucky investment? He's richer than Croesus! And didn't Uncle Billy tell you in person that those shares were worthless?"

The fixity of Drusilla's silent regard had passed from shock to doubt. And by the end of this impassioned speech, even Octavia was visibly wavering. Perhaps had it been the old Missy sitting there they might have dismissed what she said without a qualm; but this new Missy possessed an authority that lent her words the ring of unequivocal truth.

"Look," Missy went on more quietly, "I can sell your shares for ten pounds each, and I know that kind of opportunity is as rare as hen's teeth, because I was there when Uncle Billy and Uncle Edmund were talking about it. They didn't know I was listening; otherwise they'd not have said a word. They spoke of you as they think of you: with utter contempt. Believe me, they'll bully you into signing your shares away for nothing."

Drusilla sighed. "I wish I didn't believe you, Missy, but I do. And what you say comes as no surprise, deep down."

Octavia, who might have battled on in blind loyalty, instead decided to switch allegiances. "Think what a difference a Singer sewing machine would make to you, Drusilla," she said.

"I would enjoy it," admitted Drusilla.

"And I must confess I would enjoy having a hundred pounds all of my own in the bank. I would feel less of a burden."

Drusilla capitulated. "Very well, then, Missy, you may have our shares to sell."

"I want Aunt Cornelia's and Aunt Julia's as well!"

"Cornelia could certainly do with the money," said Octavia, feeling more cheerful every moment. "She could afford to have her feet done by that German bone specialist in Sydney. She does so much standing! And you know how desperate Julia is, now that the Olympus Café has put in that extra room out back, with marble-topped tables and a pianist every afternoon. If she had a hundred pounds, she could afford to make her tearoom even swankier than the Olympus Café."

"I'll do my best to talk them into it," said Drusilla.

"Well, if you do talk them into it, they have to be here at Missalonghi on Sunday afternoon at five o'clock, with their shares. All of you will have to sign a power of attorney."

"Why at five o'clock on Sunday?" asked Octavia.

"Because that's when my friend Una is coming to witness the signing of the documents."

"Oh, how nice!" Inspiration struck Octavia. "I shall bake her a batch of my plain biscuits."

Missy grinned. "For once in our lives, Aunt Octavia, I think we can treat ourselves to a slap-up Sunday high tea."

No one gave her any argument about that.

WHEN Missy arrived at the Byron railway station at six o'clock on Tuesday morning, she carried forty shares in the Byron Bottle Company and four duly signed and witnessed powers of attorney. Una, it turned out, was a justice of the peace in spite of her sex, and had fixed a most official-looking seal to the documents.

Una was waiting on the platform, and so was Alicia—not together, for Alicia was at the engine end, where the first-class carriages would stand, and Una was at the second-class end. As Missy passed by, Alicia sniffed and deliberately turned the other way. Thank heavens for that, thought Missy unrepentantly.

The rails began to hum, and shortly afterward the train came into the station, a huge black monster of an engine clunking past in torrents of grimy smoke and fierce gushes of thick white steam.

"Wasn't that the famous Alicia Marshall?" Una asked as she and Missy found themselves a couple of vacant seats.

"Yes," said Missy. "What did you think of her?"

"Obvious and flashy, darling. Keeps all her goods in the shopwindow, and you know what happens to goods in shopwindows, don't you? They *fade*. I give her another year at most. After that she'll grow enormously fat and lazy, and she'll develop the most dreadful temper. I believe she's going to marry a mere lad. Pity. What she needs is a man who will make her work very hard and treat her like dirt."

Missy giggled. Oh, Una, she thought, you are such fun. I've never met anyone like you, nor anyone so full of life.

When the train drew into its terminus at Central Station, the hands of the platform clock said twenty minutes to nine. Missy's appointment with the specialist was for ten, which left them time for a cup of tea in the railway refreshment rooms. Then they went down Castlereagh Street on the tram, and from there to where the specialist had his office on Macquarie Street.

At ten on the dot, Dr. George Parkinson's haughty nurse took Missy into a room plentifully endowed with movable screens of terrifying whiteness. She was directed to remove all her clothes, place a white wrap around her scrawny person, and lie down on the examining table to wait for Doctor.

What an odd way to meet someone, she couldn't help thinking when Dr. Parkinson's face loomed over hers; she was left to wonder what he looked like when his nostrils were not his most prominent feature. With his nurse in silent attendance, he thumped her chest, listened to her heart and lungs through a far sleeker stethoscope than Dr. Hurlingford's, took her pulse, stuck a spatula down her throat until she gagged dangerously, felt both sides of her neck and under her chin with impatient, hard fingers, then went rolling around her flinching belly with his palms.

The internal examinations left Missy feeling as if she had undergone a major operation without benefit of chloroform, but there was worse to come. Dr. Parkinson flipped her over onto her front and then went poking along her backbone until, somewhere around her shoulder blades, he grunted several times.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, striking treasure trove.

Without any warning Missy was grabbed around head and heels and hips by doctor and nurse combined; it was all over so quickly she had no positive idea what they did, except that there came the sound of a grinding crunch, all the more horrifying because she heard it inside her ears as well as outside them.

"You may get dressed now, Miss Wright, and then go through that door," ordered Dr. Parkinson, and went through that door himself with his nurse still in attendance.

Shaken and diminished, Missy did as she was told.

The right way up he turned out to have a very pleasant face, and his light blue eyes were kind and interested.

"Well, Miss Wright, you may return home today," he said, fingering a letter that lay on his cluttered desk.

"Am I all right?" asked Missy.

"Perfectly all right. There's absolutely nothing wrong with your heart. You've got a badly pinched nerve near the top of your spine, and those vigorous walks of yours kinked it into a vigorous protest, that's all."

"But . . . I couldn't breathe!" whispered Missy, aghast.

"Panic, Miss Wright, panic! When the nerve kinks, the pain is very severe, and it is just possible that in your case it inhibits some of the respiratory musculature. But there's really no need to worry. I manipulated your spine myself now, and that should fix it up as long as you slow down when you're walking some distance."

"And there's nothing else wrong with me?"

"Disappointed, eh?" asked Dr. Parkinson shrewdly. "Come now, Miss Wright! Why on earth would you prefer to have heart trouble instead of a kinked spinal nerve?"

It was a question Missy had no intention of answering aloud. How could one die in John Smith's arms of a kinked spinal nerve? It was as romantic as pimples.

Dr. Parkinson sat back in his chair and regarded her thoughtfully. "How often do you have a period, Miss Wright?"

She blushed, and hated herself for blushing. "Every six months."

"Pain? Cramps?"

"No."

"H'm." He pursed his lips. "Miss Wright," he said at last, "what really ails you can only be effectively cured if you find yourself a husband and have a couple of babies. I doubt you'd ever have more than a couple, because I don't think you'll fall easily, but at your age it's high time you got started."

"If I could find someone willing to start me, Doctor, believe me I would start!" said Missy tartly.

"I beg your pardon."

At this precise and uncomfortable moment Dr. Parkinson's nurse thrust her head around the door and wiggled her brows.

He rose immediately. "Excuse me."

For perhaps a minute Missy sat immobile in her chair, wondering whether she ought to get up and tiptoe out. Then Dr. Neville Hurlingford's name leaped at her from the top of a letter on the desk. Missy's hand reached out and picked up the letter.

"Dear George," it said. "Odd that I should send you two patients in the same week, when I've sent you none in six months. But such is my practice in Byron. This letter is to introduce Missy Wright, a poor little old maid who has had at least one attack of chest pain and breathlessness following a long, brisk walk. Her return to normal was dramatically sudden, and upon examination I could find no sequelae of any kind. I suspect hysteria, given her stagnant, deprived existence. But to be safe, I'd like you to see her with a view to excluding any serious illness."

Missy put the letter down and closed her eyes. Did the whole world see her with pity and contempt? "Stagnant, deprived . . . a poor little old maid . . . with a view to excluding any serious illness"—as if stagnation, deprivation, and old maidenhood were not serious illnesses in themselves!

She opened her eyes, surprised to discover that they contained not one tear. Instead, they were bright and dry and angry. And they began searching through the papers on Dr. Parkinson's desk to see if there was a report on her condition. She found two reports, neither distinguished by a name; one had a list of findings on it that all said "normal"; the other was a technical litany of disaster, all to do with the heart. And she discovered the beginning of a letter to Dr. Hurlingford.

"Dear Neville," the letter said. "Thank you for referring Mrs. Anastasia Gilroy and Miss Wright. I am sure you will not object if I send you my opinion about both patients in this one—"

And there it ended. Mrs. Anastasia Gilroy? After sifting through a few of the non-Hurlingford faces in Byron, Missy came up with a sickly-looking woman of about her own age, who lived in a rundown cottage beside the bottling plant, with a drunken husband and several small, neglected children.

Was the second clinical report about Mrs. Gilroy, then? Missy picked it up and tried to decipher the jargon. The last part was clear enough, even to her.

It said, "I can offer no course of treatment able to change or modify this prognosis. The patient is suffering from an advanced form of multiple valvular disease of the heart. I give her six months to one year of life. However, I can see no point in recommending bed rest, as I imagine this patient would simply ignore the directive, given her nature and home situation."

Voices sounded on the other side of the door; Missy folded up the report swiftly and stuffed it into her purse.

"My dear Miss Wright, I am so sorry!" cried Dr. Parkinson, breezing in with sufficient flurry to send the papers on his desk flying in all directions. "You can go, you can go!"

Sydney was warmer and moister than the Blue Mountains, and the day was fine and clear. Emerging onto Macquarie Street with Una at her side, Missy blinked in the brightness.

"Nearly half past eleven," said Una. "Shall we go and sell our share certificates first? The address is in Bridge Street, nearby."

So they did that, and it was remarkably easy. However, the small office and its surly clerk offered no clue as to the identity of the mystery buyer; the most intriguing aspect of the sale was that they were paid in gold sovereigns rather than in paper money.

Afterward they had lunch at the Hotel Metropole. In all her life Missy had never eaten in a restaurant, even her aunt Julia's tearoom. So the opulent vastness of the Metropole staggered her, with its crystal chandeliers and marble columns. As for the food, Missy had never tasted anything as delicious as the crayfish salad Una ordered for her.

"I think I might be able to get fat, if I could eat food like this every day," said Missy ecstatically.

Una smiled at her without pity, but with a great deal of understanding. "Poor Missy! Life has passed you by, hasn't it? Now me, life ran over like a through train. Bang, boom, crash, and there's our Una flat on her face in the water. But cheer up, darling, do! Life won't always pass you by, I promise."

Wanting to tell Una how very much she liked her, but too inhibited to do so, Missy sought around for an acceptable topic of conversation. "You haven't asked me what the doctor said."

Una's bright blue eyes gleamed. "What did he say?"

Missy sighed. "My heart is as sound as a bell."

"Are you sure?"

Knowing exactly what Una was implying, she smiled. "All right, yes, it is a bit affected. But not by a disease."

"If you like John Smith so terribly much, why don't you show him you like him?"

"Me?"

"Yes, darling, you! You know, your real trouble is that you've been brought up to think that if you don't look and act like Alicia Marshall, no man could ever be interested. But, my dear, there are many men with more taste and discrimination than that, and I happen to know that John Smith is one of them." She smiled impishly. "In fact, I think you'd suit John Smith extremely well."

"Is he married?"

"He was at one time, but he's single now—his wife died."

"Oh! Was she . . . was she nice?"

Una thought about that. "Well, at any rate *I* liked her. There were plenty who didn't."

"Did he like her?"

"I think he probably liked her well enough in the beginning, but not nearly well enough in the end."

"Oh."

Una commandeered the bill; lunch was her treat, she said. And then they just went tamely home.

"So I don't have heart trouble at all," said Missy to her mother and aunt. "In fact, my heart is perfect."

Both anxious, pale faces fell instantly into repose.

"Oh, that is good news!" said Octavia.

"What is the matter, then?" asked Drusilla.

"I have a pinched nerve in my spine. Dr. Parkinson did what he called a manipulation, and I should be quite well from now on." With a hefty swing Missy deposited her handbag on the table and grinned. "Here's something a lot more important—

look!" And she withdrew four neatly wrapped cylinders. "One hundred pounds for you, Mother, all in gold. And the same for Aunt Octavia, Aunt Cornelia, and Aunt Julia."

"It's a miracle," said Drusilla.

"No, it's a little tardy justice," contradicted Missy. "You will buy that Singer sewing machine now, won't you?"

Prudence warred with desire in Drusilla's breast until she declared a temporary truce with the outcome undecided. "I said I would think about it, and I will."

When bedtime came around, Missy lay contentedly in the dark and thought about John Smith. So he had been married, but his wife was dead. There could surely have been no children, or he would surely have them with him for at least part of the time. . . .

By midnight her plan was all worked out, and her mind was made up. She would do it, and she would do it tomorrow. After all, what did she have to lose? If her scheme did not bear fruit, she would simply have to continue for the next thirty-three years as she had gone on for the last thirty-three years. Certainly it was worth a try.

Somewhere in her suddenly sleepy brain a little thought was spared for John Smith, the unsuspecting victim. Was it fair? Yes, came the answer. Missy turned over and went to sleep with no further misgivings.

Drusilla elected to bear the four hundred pounds into Byron without assistance, and set off for the bank the next morning at nine o'clock. While Octavia pottered happily in the kitchen, Missy quietly packed her scant clothing into a battered carpetbag and left a note for her mother. Then she let herself out the front door, walked down the path to the gate, and turned left, not right.

This time she didn't timidly explore the start of the descent into John Smith's valley; she walked down it with decision and purpose, using a strong stick and the carpetbag to keep her balance on the treacherous rubble. At the bottom of the landslide the going became easier as the road plunged into a forest. It was not nearly as cold as she imagined it might be, for the ramparts far above took the brunt of the wind; down on the valley floor all was still and calm.

Four miles on, the woodland turned into a kind of jungle, thick with vines and creepers and tree ferns, even several varieties of palm. There were bellbirds everywhere, their calls filling the air with silvery chimes, thin and clear and elfin. And other birdsongs wove through the chimes—long carols from magpies, joyous trills from tiny fantails, which fluttered only inches from her face and seemed to be welcoming her into their home.

The third hour of walking was very damp, the sun hardly showing through the canopy of leaves above, the track slippery from moss and mud. When the first leech dropped on her hand, Missy's impulse was to screech and run, especially after all her frantic efforts to dislodge it proved in vain. But she made herself stand absolutely still, then gave herself a severe lecture; if these disgusting things lived in John Smith's forest, then she must cope with them in a way that would not brand her in his eyes as a silly woman. The leech began to swell up plumply, and on the exposed skin of her neck and face it was joined by several equally vampirish brothers. Wretched things! They wouldn't let go! So she moved on in the hope that she would encounter fewer leeches moving than standing in one spot, a hope that was right. Replete, the first one detached itself without fuss and flopped to the ground, as did its brothers. But the wounds kept on bleeding away. What a sight she must look! Lesson number one about dreams versus reality.

Shortly afterward the sound of the river began to fill the distance, and Missy's courage started to melt away; it took more resolution and strength to walk those last few hundred yards than to mount the whole expedition.

There it was, just around the next bend. A low small cabin built of wattle and daub, with a shingle roof and a sandstone chimney. A thin blur of smoke smudged the perfect blue of the sky.

Since it was no part of her plan to pounce on him unawares, Missy stopped at the edge of the clearing and called his name several times in her loudest voice. Two horses grazing in a fenced-off yard lifted their heads to gaze at her curiously, but of John Smith there was no sign. He must be off somewhere, then. She sat down on a convenient tree stump to wait.

The wait wasn't long, for she had arrived a little before one o'clock, and he soon came merrily whistling back to the cabin to get himself some lunch. Even after he entered the clearing he didn't see her; she was sitting in line with the horses.

"Mr. Smith!" she called.

He stopped in his tracks, did not move for a moment, then turned. "Oh, bloody hell!" he said. When he reached her, he scowled at her horribly, not a scrap of welcome in his eyes. "What are you doing here?"

Missy gulped in a big breath; it was now or never. "Will you marry me, Mr. Smith?" she asked, enunciating very distinctly.

His anger fled at once, replaced by unconcealed mirth. "It's a long walk down, so you'd better come in and have a cup of tea, Miss Wright," he said, eyes dancing. A finger flicked at the blood on her face. "Leeches, eh? I'm surprised you lasted the distance."

His hand went under her elbow, and he walked her across the clearing without saying another word. The cabin had no veranda, and as Missy saw when she entered, the floor was of packed earth, the fittings spartan. However, for a bachelor establishment it looked remarkably neat and clean. A new cast-iron cooking range filled half the chimney, an open fireplace the other half; there was a long, rough-hewn table and two straight kitchen chairs. He had made his bed from timber slabs and piled three mattresses and a feather quilt on top. Some cowhide stretched across a chunky wooden frame served as an easy chair. There were no curtains on the one window, which looked as if it had been recently glazed.

He lit two kerosene lamps, put one on the table and the other on a crate beside his bed, then busied himself making tea.

"There's really enough light," said Missy, "without lamps."

"You're sitting in front of the window, Miss Wright, and I want some light on your face."

So Missy lapsed into silence, letting her eyes wander wherever they chose. He served the tea in enamel mugs, and biscuits still in their huge, gaudy tin, but he did everything without apology and with no physical awkwardness. Then he carried his mug and a fistful of biscuits to the leather easy chair, which he pulled around so he could sit facing her at close quarters.

"Why on earth, Miss Wright, would you want to marry me?"

"Because I love you!" said Missy, her tone astonished.

This answer threw him into confusion; as if suddenly he didn't wish her to see what might lie in his eyes, he removed his gaze from her person to the window behind her, frowning.

"That's ridiculous," he said at last. "You can't possibly love someone you don't even know, woman!"

"I know quite enough about you to love you," she said earnestly. "I know that you're very kind. You're strong on the inside. You're clean. You're different. And you . . . you have enough *poetry* in you to want to live here, of all places."

He laughed. "I must say that's the most interesting catalogue of virtues I've ever heard. I like the clean bit best."

"It's important," said Missy gravely.

For a moment he looked as if amusement might get the better of him again, but with an effort he remained sober and said, "I'm afraid I can't marry you, Miss Wright."

"Why?"

"Why? I'll tell you why," he said, leaning forward in his chair. "You are looking at a man who has found happiness for the first time in his life! I'm pushing fifty, Miss Wright, and I'm finally doing all the things I've always wanted to do—and I'm *alone!* No wife, no dependents of any kind. And I love it! To have to share it would spoil it. *Marriage?* Not in a fit!"

"I understand how you feel, Mr. Smith, and I do mean that most sincerely. But I cannot imagine for a moment that your life has been as drab and uneventful as mine has always been. I want to live a little before it's too late! Can you understand that?"

"Who couldn't? But if you're in a proposing mood, why not put the hard word on some of the widowers or bachelors in Byron?"

"That would be a fate worse than Missalonghi, because it would be no different. I've chosen you because you're living exactly the kind of life I want to live—away from people, smugness, and gossip. Believe me, Mr. Smith, I have no intention of cramping your style. And it wouldn't be forever, I promise you. A year. Just one little year!"

"So after a year of living the sort of life you're dying to live, you're going to pick up and tamely go back to the life you hate?"

Missy drew up her meager form with profound dignity. "I only have a year to live, Mr. Smith," she said.

He looked desperately sorry for her, as if he now knew everything about her there was to know.

She pushed her advantage relentlessly. "I understand your reluctance to share this paradise, but try to see my side, please! I am thirty-three years old, and I am an old maid! That is the most dreadful fate a woman can suffer, for it goes hand in hand with poverty and lack of beauty. If I had suffered one without the other, some man would have been prepared to marry me, but to suffer both is to be completely undesirable. Yet I *know* I have a great deal to offer. You would enjoy all the advantages, Mr. Smith, for I would be tied to you by gratitude as well as by love. I have good sense and no puffed-up notion of my own importance. And I would try with might and main to be the nicest of companions for you, as well as the most loving."

He got up abruptly and went to stand looking out the door, his hands clasped behind his back. "Women," he said, "are liars, cheats, connivers, and fools. I wouldn't care if I never saw another woman as long as I lived. As for love—I don't *want* to be loved! I just want to be left alone!" This cry from the heart he seemed to think was enough; then, rethinking, he added harshly, "How do I know you're telling me the truth?"

Missy opened her purse and fished out the neatly folded piece of paper she had appropriated from Dr. Parkinson's desk, then got up from her chair and walked across to join him at the door. "Here. Read this. You do know I'm ill, because you were there when I had my first bad turn. And when I met you the other day on my walk, I'm sure I told you I had to go to Sydney to see a heart specialist. Well, this is his report on my condition. I stole it, because I don't want my mother and aunt to know I'm so sick. I told them I had a kinked spinal nerve, and if I can keep up the deception, that's what they're going to go on believing."

He took the paper and read it quickly. "Aside from being awfully skinny, you look healthy enough to me," he said doubtfully.

Missy did some fast thinking and prayed he was no medical expert. "Why, between my turns I am healthy enough! Mine is not the sort of heart trouble that saps the strength; it's more like . . . like having little strokes. The valves stick, and . . . and when they do, the blood stops flowing. That, I gather, is what's going to kill me." She heaved a sigh and began to scale histrionic heights with the aplomb of an actress. "I shall just go out like a light one day!" Her eyes lifted to his wistfully. "I don't want to die at Missalonghi!" she wailed pitifully. "I want to die in the arms of the man I love!" A big tear fell down her cheek, while others, still swimming, threatened to follow its lead.

He groaned the groan of a condemned man. "For heaven's sake, woman, don't cry!"

"Why not?" sobbed Missy, scrabbling up her sleeve for her handkerchief. "I think I have every right to cry!"

"Then go ahead and cry!" he said loudly, goaded beyond endurance, and marched out the door.

Missy stood mopping her tears as he strode to the far side of the clearing and disappeared from view. Then, head down, she returned to her chair and finished her cry with no more appreciative audience than a large blowfly.

Suddenly she felt very tired, utterly dispirited. All that and no result. She let herself out of the cabin quietly and made sure that she closed the door. It was a nine-mile walk, all uphill; it would be late before she arrived back at Missalonghi.

"Yet I don't feel sorry I tried," she said aloud. "It was worth a try, I *know* it was."

"Miss Wright!"

She turned, hope kindling and blazing.

"Hold on. I'll drive you home."

"Thank you, I can walk," she said, not stiffly or huffily, just in her old colorlessly polite manner.

By this time he had reached her side, and he put his hand beneath her elbow. "No, it's too late and too hard a walk, especially for you. Sit here while I harness up." And he deposited her on the same tree stump where she had sat waiting for him.

She really was too tired to face the walk, so she made no demur. When he was ready, he lifted her up into the cart as easily as if she were a child.

"Angry?" he asked as he turned the horses out of the clearing onto the track.

She glanced at him in surprise. "No! Why should I be?"

"Well, you didn't meet with much luck, did you?"

She laughed, not very heartily, yet still a genuine laugh. "Poor Mr. Smith, you don't understand at all."

"Obviously I don't. What's the joke?"

"I had nothing to lose. Nothing!"

"Did you really think you might win?"

"I was sure I would win."

"Why?"

"Because you're you."

"And what does that mean?"

"Oh . . . just that you're so very kind. A decent person."

"Thanks."

After that, little was said; the horses plodded reluctantly along the jungly track. Eventually he pulled up outside the front gate of Missalonghi. "Here you are, home again."

She jumped down without assistance. "Thank you, dear Mr. Smith. It's as I still maintain—you're a very kind man."

In answer, he tipped his hat and flashed her a smile, then began turning his horses.

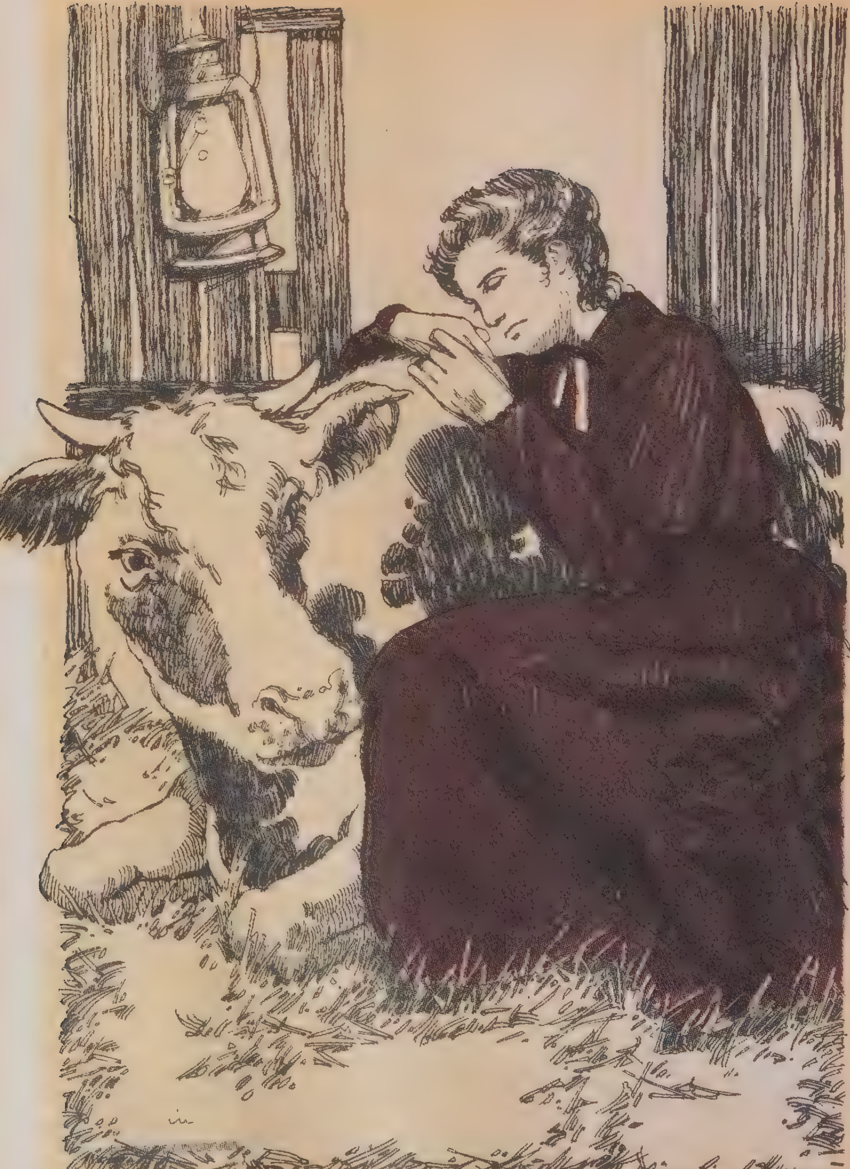
OCTAVIA found Missy's note when she went to investigate Missy's whereabouts. Her heart thudded down into her boots; and when she heard Drusilla letting herself in through the front door, she scuttled down the hall with the note in her hand. "Missy's gone, and she's left this for you!"

The skin over Drusilla's cheeks began to prickle uncomfortably; she snatched the note from Octavia and read it aloud. "Dear Mother," it said. "Please forgive me for going off without a word, but I really think it is better that you do not know what I plan until I know whether or not it's going to work. I will probably be home tomorrow or the next day for a visit at least. Please do not worry. I am safe. Your loving daughter, Missy."

Octavia's tears overflowed, but Drusilla did not weep. She folded up the letter and carried it into the kitchen, where she propped it very carefully on the shelf of the chimney.

"We must call in the police," said Octavia tearfully.

"We will do no such thing," contradicted Drusilla. "The events of the last few days have taught me that Missy is a person to be reckoned with. I have no doubt that she is safe."



"But she's out there somewhere without a soul to protect her from men!"

"It may just be that Missy has decided she would rather not be protected from men," said Drusilla dryly. "Now stop crying, and make us some tea. I have a lot to tell you."

Curiosity overcame distress; Octavia poured water into the kettle and set it on the stove. "Well, what?" she asked eagerly.

"I gave Cornelia and Julia their money, and I bought myself a Singer sewing machine."

"Drusilla!"

And so the two ladies left at Missalonghi drank their tea and discussed the events of the day more thoroughly, after which they went back to their respective routines.

The organ had saved Missy from detection when John Smith dropped her back at Missalonghi; no one heard his cart, and no one heard Missy as she crept around back to the shed. It held no place capable of concealing her, but she managed to tuck her carpetbag down behind a sack of fodder, and then she took shelter in the orchard before her mother came out to milk the cow.

Not until after full darkness had fallen did Missy stir; it was the penetrating cold spring air that drove her from the orchard at last into the relative warmth of the shed. Buttercup was lying with feet tucked under, placidly chewing cud. So Missy put a clean sack down on the ground and curled up with her head against Buttercup's warm, rumbly side.

Of course she should have walked into the house the minute John Smith had gone, but when she tried to make her feet mount the front veranda steps, they just would not. How could you tell your mother that you'd proposed marriage to a near stranger and been refused for your pains? Maybe in the morning she could confess, she told herself, gasping at the ache and sorrow of it; but then, how much worse would that be, with a night spent elsewhere to be accounted for? Go inside at once, whispered her better self; but her worse self could not find the courage.

The tears began to gather and to fall, for Missy was exhausted.

"Oh, Buttercup, what am I going to do?" She wept.

Buttercup merely huffed.

And shortly afterward Missy fell asleep.

The Missalonghi rooster woke her about an hour before daybreak. She leaped up, confused, then subsided against her living pillow in a fresh agony of pain and bewilderment.

But by dawn she had made up her mind what to do, and rose with purpose in her movements. Pulling comb and brush from the carpetbag, she tidied herself as best she could, but at the end of her efforts was dismally aware she smelled strongly of cow.

No sound of stirring life came from Missalonghi as she crept past it, and faintly from out her mother's window came a series of little snores. Safe.

Down once more into John Smith's valley, not with the irrepressible happiness of yesterday, when nothing had seemed impossible and everything had seemed bound to end well. This time Missy marched with little hope but with iron determination. For ask again she would, and tomorrow, if he said nay today, and the day after, and the day after that. . . .

It was going on ten o'clock when she came at last to the clearing and the cabin; there rose the same rippling blur from the chimney, but, as yesterday, no John Smith. Down on the tree stump she sat to wait.

Noon came and went without a sign of him, and Missy resigned herself to waiting the whole afternoon as well. Indeed, the light was fading rapidly when he arrived home. More seriously than yesterday, but just as blind to Missy sitting on her stump.

"Mr. Smith!"

"Bloody hell!" He came across the clearing immediately to stand looking down at her. "What are you doing back here?"

"Will you marry me, Mr. Smith?"

This time he didn't put his hand beneath her elbow and walk her to the cabin; he merely watched as she rose to her feet.

"Is someone putting you up to this?" he asked.

"No."

"Does it really mean that much to you?"

"It means my life, literally. I am not going home! I'm going to come here every day and ask again."

"You're playing with fire, Miss Wright," he said, lips thin and tight. "Hasn't it occurred to you that a man might resort to violence if a woman refuses to leave him alone?"

She smiled up serenely, sublimely, seraphically. "Some men, maybe. But not you, Mr. Smith. Will you marry me?"

He lifted his head to stare up at something she couldn't see. And said nothing for what seemed like a very long time. Then he shrugged, looked down at her. "I admit I've thought a lot about you since yesterday, and even the heaviest work I could find didn't stop my thinking about you. And I started to wonder too if maybe I was being offered a way to atone, and if my luck might disappear because I ignored the offer."

"A way to atone? Atone for what?"

"Just a figure of speech. Everyone has something to atone for. Very well. I'll marry you."

All of Missy's pain and numbness flew away. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Smith! You won't regret it, I promise!"

He grunted. "You're a child, Miss Wright, not a grown woman, and perhaps that's why I've given in rather than strangled you. I can't honestly believe there's woman's guile in you. Only don't ever give me reason to change that opinion."

And now his hand went under her arm, the signal to walk.

"There's one thing I must ask, Mr. Smith," she said.

"What?"

"That we never refer to the fact that I'm going to die, nor let it influence our behavior. I want to be free! And I cannot be free if I am to be perpetually reminded that I'm going to die."

"Agreed," said John Smith.

Not wanting to push her luck, for she sensed she had gone about as far in that line as was prudent, Missy entered the cabin and went to sit quietly in one of the kitchen chairs, while John Smith stood staring out the door at the beginnings of a thin blue night's ground mist.

Silently she watched his back, which was long and broad and, at the moment, extremely eloquent. But after about five minutes she ventured to say, her voice very small and apologetic, "What happens now, Mr. Smith?"

He jumped as if he had forgotten she was there, and went to sit opposite her at the table. His face in the gloom was heavy, a little daunting. But when he spoke, it was cheerfully enough. "My name is John," he said, and got up to light his two lamps. "As to the main business, we get a license, and then we get married."

"How long will it take?"

He shrugged. "I don't know, if banns aren't called. A couple of days? Maybe even sooner, with a special license. In the meantime, I'd better drive you home."

"Oh, no! I'm staying here," said Missy.

"If you stay here, you're likely to start your honeymoon prematurely," he said, hope blossoming. What a good idea! She might decide she didn't like it! After all, most women didn't. At which point he made the mistake of looking at her to see how she reacted. And there she was, poor little dying thing, just gazing at him with blind, foolish affection, like a puppy awash with love. John Smith's sleeping heart moved, felt a bitter and unaccustomed pain. For indeed she had haunted him all day, no matter how hard he worked to drive out her image.

So they retired dinnerless to bed. But Missy liked it very well, and demonstrated a surprising aptitude for it. Another nail went thudding into John Smith's coffin, as he wryly admitted to himself about three hours later. Though dreadfully ignorant at first, she was neither shy nor shamed, and her affectionate responses warmed and touched him. How much *life* there was in her, just waiting to be tapped. Suddenly the thought that the end of her life was imminent shocked him; it was one thing to pity someone he didn't know, quite another to face the same dilemma with someone he knew intimately. That was the trouble with beds. They turned strangers into intimates more quickly than ten years of polite teas in parlors.

Missy slept like a log and woke before John Smith did. A faint light filtered through the window, so she eased herself carefully out of the bed and stood shivering until she donned the dressing gown out of her bag. How lovely it had been! She remembered those big, strong, work-roughened hands stroking and soothing and comforting. Feelings and sensations, touches and kisses, heat and light . . . oh, yes, it was lovely!

She moved as quietly as she could about the cabin, heating up the stove and putting the kettle on to boil. But of course her activity woke him, and he got out of bed too. He walked straight across to her, folded her in his arms, and stood rocking gently.

"Good morning," she whispered, her smiling lips pressing little kisses on his shoulder.

"Morning," he mumbled, evidently liking her response.

She was ravenous, having had virtually nothing to eat in two days. "I'll get breakfast," she said.

"Want a bath?" He sounded more awake, but made no attempt to move away from her.

He could smell Buttercup! Oh, poor man! Hunger fled yet again. "Yes, please."

"Get your shoes on."

While she slid her feet into her boots, he rummaged in a big chest and produced two towels, old and rough but clean.

The clearing sparkled with frost and was still in heavy shade, but as Missy looked up, the great sandstone walls of the valley were already glowing red with the sunrise, and the sky was taking on the muted milky radiance of a pearl.

She was shivering in anticipation of an icy plunge into the river; he looked like the kind of man who would relish freezing ablutions. Maybe, she thought, I'll be hoist with my own petard, and keel over stone dead from the shock.

But instead of steering her toward the river, John Smith drew her into the middle of a thicket of tree ferns and wild clematis in feathery white flower. And there before her was the most beautiful bathing room in the entire world, a warm spring that trickled out of a cleft between two rocks and fell thinly into a wide and mossy basin.

Missy had her robe off in a flash, and two seconds later was stepping down into a crystal-clear pool of blood-heat water, tendrils of steam rising languorously off it into the chilly air. It was about eighteen inches deep, and its bottom was clean, smooth rock. No leeches, either!

"Go easy on the soap," advised John Smith, pointing to where a fat cake of his expensive brand sat in a small niche by the pool.

"Now I understand why you're so clean," she said, thinking of Missalonghi baths—two inches of water in the bottom of the rusting tub, hot from a kettle and cold from a bucket. And that one miserably inadequate ration of water was used by all three ladies.

Quite unaware of how alluring she looked, she smiled up at him. "Aren't you coming in too?" she asked in the tones of a professional temptress. "There's plenty of room."

He needed no further encouragement, and appeared to forget his strictures about the production of suds, so assiduous was he in soaping her; nor did she think that his thoroughness had much to do with Buttercup. She submitted with purring pleasure, but then insisted upon returning the service. And so bathtime occupied the best part of an hour.

However, over breakfast he got down to business. "There must be a registry office in Katoomba, so we'll go on in and get a marriage license," he said.

"If I stop off at Missalonghi and then catch the train from Byron, I imagine I'll get to Katoomba almost as quickly as you will in your cart," said Missy. "I must see Mother. I want to shop for food, and I have to take a book back to the library."

He looked suddenly alarmed. "You're not by any chance planning a big wedding, are you?"

She laughed. "No! Just you and me will do very well. I left a note for Mother, though, so I want to make sure she's not too upset. And my dearest friend works in the library. Would you mind if she came to our wedding?"

"Not if you want her there. Though I warn you, if I can persuade the powers that be, I'd like to get it over with today."

"In Katoomba?"

"Yes."

Married in *brown!* Missy sighed. Wouldn't you know it?

"Do you have a birth certificate?" he went on.

"Yes, in my bag."

"What's your real name?"

Her reaction was extraordinary: she went red, shifted around on her chair, clenched her teeth. "Can't you just use Missy? It's what I've always been called, honestly."

"Sooner or later your real name is going to have to come out." He grinned. "Come on, it can't be that bad, surely."

"Missalonghi."

He burst out laughing. "You're pulling my leg!"

"I wish I were."

"You poor little thing!" he said.

THIS TIME MISSY'S FEET experienced no trouble mounting the steps to the front veranda of Missalonghi; she banged on the door as if she were a stranger.

Drusilla answered, and looked at her daughter as if she really were a stranger. Definitely there was nothing the matter with her! In fact, she looked better than in all her life.

"I know what you've been doing, my girl," she said. "I wish you'd stuck to reading about it, but I daresay that's crying over spilt milk now, eh? Are you back for good?"

"No." Missy smiled at her mother lovingly; how odd that only now that the cord binding her to Missalonghi was broken did she understand the depth of her love for Drusilla.

"I thank you very much, Mother," she said, "for according me the dignity of assuming I know what I'm doing." Then, feeling the need to hurry, Missy gave her a kiss and was off.

She walked from Missalonghi into Byron. What a beautiful, beautiful day! For the first time in her life she felt really well, the bursting-out-of-one's-skin sensation she had read about but never experienced. She had lied and cheated and stolen to feel this happy, and she wasn't at all sorry for it. The Alicias of this world might snap their fingers and conjure up the men of their choice, but no use pretending a man like John Smith would have looked sideways at a Missy Wright, snap though she would. And yet she *knew* she could make John Smith the happiest man—if not in the world—at least in the town of Byron. She had better! Because when her year was up, he would have to want her to live so badly that he would be prepared to forgive her the deceit.

Time was getting on, and she had to make sure she caught the eleven-o'clock train into Katoomba, where John Smith had promised to be waiting for her at the station. Groceries she could put off until tomorrow, but somehow she had a feeling Una could not be postponed. To the library it was, then.

A magnificent motorcar was purring sedately down Byron Street as Missy hurried along, inconspicuous as ever. Which was more than could be said for the motorcar; it had collected an admiring audience down both sides of the road. Glancing at it, Missy decided the chauffeur had a definite edge over the two occupants of the tonneau when it came to haughty aloofness. The chauffeur she knew from hearsay: a handsome fellow, with more love for cutting a fine figure than hard work, and a reputation for treating his many women badly. The occupants of the tonneau she knew from bitter experience: Alicia and Uncle Billy.

Alicia's eyes met hers. The next moment the sumptuous car had slewed sideways into the curb, and Alicia and Uncle Billy were tumbling out well ahead of the startled chauffeur.

"What do you mean, Missy Wright, taking Aunt Cornelia's shares and selling them out from under our noses?" demanded Alicia, two bright red spots burning in her alabaster cheeks.

"Why shouldn't I?" asked Missy coolly.

"Because it's none of your damned interfering business!" barked Sir William, stiff with outrage.

"It's as much my business as it is yours, Uncle Billy. I knew where I could get Aunt Cornelia ten pounds a share, and she needs the money badly. You might like to know that I have also sold Aunt Julia's shares, and Aunt Octavia's, and Mother's."

"What?" squawked Sir William.

"All of them? You sold all of them?" faltered Alicia, the red spots in her cheeks draining away in a second.

"I most certainly did." Missy said. "Now if you'll both excuse me, I must dash. I have an appointment to be married." And she walked away with her nose in the air.

"I think I'm going to faint," announced Alicia, and suited action to words by flopping against Uncle Herbert's shopwindow.

Sir William called for assistance from his chauffeur; they supported Alicia between them back to the car, the chauffeur's ungloved fingers around Alicia's waist. By this time the crowd had swelled to include all of Uncle Herbert's sons and grandsons, so Sir William dumped Alicia unceremoniously on the seat and ordered the chauffeur to drive off immediately.

Alicia lay back against the seat and let the cool air fan her skin. Thank heaven! She was beginning to feel better. Right in front of her she could see the chauffeur's proudly shaped head and strong, smooth neck. He was handsome and dark. It took a brawny man to heft her around as easily as he had. What was his name? Frank? Yes, Frank Pellagrino. He used to work at the bottling plant until he got the post as Uncle Billy's chauffeur.

A sidelong glance at Sir William revealed him sitting bolt upright, a very worried man.

"Do those forty shares make so much difference to us?" she asked.

"All the difference in the world, now we know Livvie's Richard sold out a month ago." Sir William sighed. "And it explains why the mystery buyer thinks he has sufficient clout to call an extraordinary meeting tomorrow."

"How could Missy be such a fool!" snarled Alicia. Then her eyes reverted to the back of the chauffeur's head, a far nicer prospect than her prospective father-in-law's choleric countenance.

When Missy walked into the library, she fully expected to find Una, even though it was not one of Una's days. And sure enough, there was Una behind the desk.

"Oh, Missy, I'm so glad to see you!" she cried, jumping up. "I have a surprise for you. Wait right there."

Una vanished into the tea cubicle and came out bearing a large white box and a hatbox, each tied up with white ribbon. "Happy anything, dearest Missy."

They smiled at each other in complete understanding and great affection. "It's a scarlet lace dress and hat," said Una.

"I shall wear it to my wedding," replied Missy.

"John Smith! You've picked exactly the right man."

"I had to resort to trickery and deception to get him."

"If you couldn't get him any other way, why not?"

"I told him I was dying of heart trouble."

"Aren't we all?"

"That," said Missy, "is splitting hairs. Come to my wedding?"

"I'd love to, but no, I don't think John Smith would appreciate a face from the past at the ceremony."

That made sense; therefore Missy left it alone. Her gratitude was quite beyond words; her need to go quickly was great. Una stood watching her painfully, as if with her she were taking away something precious. On an impulse Missy returned to the desk, leaned over it, and put her arm about Una's shoulders, her lips against Una's cheek. So frail, so cold, so weightless!

"Good-bye, Una."

"Good-bye, my best and dearest friend. Be happy!"

MISSY MADE THE TRAIN WITH A minute to spare, and saw John Smith on the platform in Katoomba before the train came to a standstill. Thank heaven for that. He hadn't changed his mind, then. And in fact, when he saw her alight from her carriage, he even looked quite glad to see her!

"They'll issue us a license and marry us today," he said.

"And I don't have to be married in brown," said Missy, clutching her boxes. "If you'll excuse me, I'll pop into the platform ladies' room and change into my wedding dress."

"*Wedding* dress?" He looked down at his gray flannel work shirt and his old moleskin trousers in comical dismay.

She laughed. "Don't worry, it's not traditional. In fact, I guarantee that you're going to look a lot more appropriate than I am."

Her dress fitted perfectly. What an eye for size Una had! And what a wonderful color! The mirror on the wall seemed to own a touch of magic, for it lent a slight patina of beauty; adjusting her preposterous scarlet hat, Missy decided she looked very well. Her darkness was suddenly interesting; her thin body was suddenly merely slender as a young tree. Yes, very well! And certainly not spinsterish.

Once he recovered from the shock of that red, John Smith thought she looked very well too. "Now this is my sort of wedding! I look like a hayseed, and you look like a madam." He tucked her arm through his gleefully. "Come on, woman, let's get the deed over before I change my mind."

They strolled into Katoomba Street, the cynosure of all eyes and quite pleased with the sensation they were creating.

"That was easy," said Missy after the deed was done and they were sitting together in John Smith's cart. She held out her hand to see her ring. "I am now Mrs. John Smith. How nice it sounds!"

"I must say this time was a lot better than the last."

"Was your first wedding a big affair, then?"

"It could have passed for a circus. Two hundred and fifty guests, the bride with a thirty-foot train, twelve or fourteen bridesmaids, the archbishop of something presiding; at the time it was a nightmare! But compared to what followed, it was an idyll in paradise." He looked sideways at her, one eyebrow raised. "Do you want to hear this?"

"I think I'd better. They say the second wife always has to contend with the ghost of the first." She paused to gather her courage. "Was she . . . dear to you?"

"She may have been when I married her, I honestly can't remember. She must have meant to have me, because I'm sure I didn't do the proposing. I'm obviously the sort of bloke women propose to! Only I didn't mind your way of proposing; at least it was honest. But her— Once she'd landed her fish, the fish didn't matter a bit. I was just there for respectability. She didn't exactly have lovers; she had what she called cicisbeos—pansified twerps with gardenias in their buttonholes. If anyone was ever branded by the company she kept, my first wife certainly was; her women friends were as hard as nails and her men friends as soft as butter. She liked to mock me and quarrel no matter how public the place. In a nutshell, she held me in utter contempt."

"And you? What light did you hold her in?"

"I loathed her." Evidently he still did, for the feeling in his voice did not belong to an experience buried in the past.

"How long were you married?"

"About four or five years."

"Were there any children?"

"Hardly! She might have lost her figure. Then we had a terrible fight one evening over . . . oh, I don't know, something small and idiotic that actually didn't matter a bit. We lived in a house on the harbor, and apparently after I'd gone out, she decided to go for a swim. They found her body a couple of weeks later, washed up on Balmoral Beach."

"Oh, poor thing!"

He snorted. "Poor thing, nothing! The police tried to pin it on me, but luckily, the minute I went out I met a friend down the road. He'd been kicked out too, so we walked to the flat of a mutual friend—a bachelor, the wily bloke—and got drunk. And since the servants had seen her alive and well more than half an hour after we arrived at the flat, the police couldn't touch me. Anyway, the postmortem revealed that she'd died of simple drowning, with no evidence of foul play. Not that that stopped a lot of people in Sydney reckoning I did kill her—I just got a name for being too smart to get caught."

"When did all this happen?"

"About twenty years ago."

"A long time! What have you done with yourself since?"

"Well, I quit Australia as soon as the police let go. And I drifted round the world. Africa, the Klondike, China, Brazil, Texas. I changed my name, and when I did come back to Australia, I came as John Smith, with all my money in gold and no past."

"Why *Byron?*"

"Because of the valley. I knew it was coming up for sale, and I've always wanted to own a whole valley."

Feeling she had probed enough, Missy changed the subject to the skulduggery going on at the Byron Bottle Company, and told her husband about the plight her mother and aunts were in because of it. John Smith listened most attentively, a smile playing around the corners of his mouth, and when she had ended her tale, he put his arm around her, drew her across the seat against his side, and kept her there.

"Well, Mrs. Smith, I really didn't want to marry you when you first brought the subject up, but I confess I'm growing more reconciled to it every time you open your mouth," he said. "You're a woman of sense, your heart's in the right place, and you're a Hurlingford of the Hurlingfords, which gives me a lot of power I didn't expect to have. Interesting, how things turn out."

Missy rode the rest of the way home in blissful silence.

The next morning John Smith donned a suit, a collar, and a tie, all remarkably well cut and oddly smart.

"Whatever it is, it must be a lot more important than your wedding," observed Missy without a trace of resentment. "Are you going far afield?"

"Only to Byron."

"If I'm quick about it, may I come as far as Mother's with you?"

"Good idea, wife! Wait there for me until sometime late this afternoon, and you can introduce me to my in-laws when I pick you up. I'll probably have a lot to say to them."

It's going to be all right, thought Missy as she rode in her bright red dress and hat alongside her unfamiliarly elegant husband up to the top of the ridge. He likes me; he really does like me, and without even realizing it himself, he's already moved over a little to fit me in alongside him. When my year is up, I'll be able to tell him the truth. Besides, if I'm lucky, I may well by then be the mother of his child.

Before they set out for Byron he had taken her across the clearing and around its bend to where he intended to build his house. The waterfall, she discovered, fell so far that on a windy day it never reached the valley floor, spinning away instead into clouds of rainbows. Yet there was a huge, calm pool below it, fed by an underground stream, which was the color of a turquoise or of Egyptian faience, opaque as milk, dense as syrup.

"There's an outcropping of limestone here," he explained. "That's why the pool is such a bizarre color."

"And this is really where we're going to live, looking at so much loveliness?"

"Where *I* will live, anyway. I doubt you'll be here to see it." His face twisted. "Houses don't get built in a day, Missy, especially when they're built single-handed. I don't want a horde of workmen down here in my valley."

"I thought we had a bargain not to mention my condition. Anyway, you won't be building single-handed—you'll have my hands as well," said Missy cheerfully. "I'm no stranger to hard work, and the cabin is so small it won't keep me busy. From what the doctor said, it makes no difference whether I lie in a bed or work like a navvy. One day it will happen, that's all."

At which he took her in his arms and kissed her as if he enjoyed kissing her and as if she was already a little precious to him.

OCTAVIA and Drusilla were in the kitchen when Missy walked in unannounced. They stared at her in astonishment, trying to take in the full glory of that outlandish scarlet lace dress. She hadn't turned into a beauty overnight, but there was certainly an eye-catching quality about her, and there was no doubting the color suited her down to the ground.

"Oh, Missy, you look lovely!" squeaked Octavia, sitting down.

Missy kissed her and kissed her mother. "That's nice to know, Auntie, because I admit I feel lovely." She grinned at them triumphantly. "I came to tell you that I'm married," she announced, waving her left hand under their noses.

"Who?" asked Drusilla, beaming.

"John Smith. We were married yesterday, in Katoomba."

Suddenly neither to Drusilla nor to Octavia did it matter a scrap that the whole town of Byron called him a jailbird or worse; he had rescued their Missy from spinsterhood.

Octavia positively leaped up to put the kettle on, moving with more flexibility and ease than she had in years, though Drusilla didn't notice; she was too busy looking at her girl's convincingly massive wedding ring.

"Mrs. John Smith," she said. "Why, bless my soul, Missy, it sounds quite distinguished! When is he coming to see us?"

"He had some business or other in Byron, but he wants to meet you when he picks me up late this afternoon. I thought, Mother, that you and I might walk into Byron. I have to buy groceries, and I want to go to Uncle Herbert's to choose some materials for me to make into dresses. Because I am done forever with brown! I won't even wear it to work in. I'm going to work in a man's shirt and trousers, because they're a great deal more comfortable."

"Isn't it lucky that you bought a Singer sewing machine, Drusilla?" asked Octavia from the stove, too happy at the way things had turned out to worry about the trousers.

But Drusilla had something else on her mind. "Can you afford it?" she asked. "The materials at Herbert's are so expensive."

"It seems I can indeed afford it. John told me last night that he was going to put money in the bank for me this morning. Because he said a wife shouldn't have to ask her husband for every little penny she needs. All he asked was that I didn't exceed my allowance—a thousand pounds every year! Can you imagine it?"

"A thousand pounds!" Octavia and Drusilla stared at Missy in thunderstruck respect.

"Then he must be a rich man," said Drusilla, and did some rapid mental gymnastics in which she saw herself finally able to thumb her nose at Aurelia and Augusta and Antonia. Hah! Not only had Missy beaten Alicia to the altar, but now it began to look as if she might also have made the better bargain.

Drusilla consulted the clock on the kitchen wall. "If you want to shop, Missy, I suggest we make a start. Then we might have lunch with Julia in her tearoom. My word, she'll be surprised!"

"You're not going without me," Octavia announced firmly. "If I have to crawl on hands and knees, I'm coming too."

Thus in the late morning Drusilla strolled through Byron Street with her daughter on one arm and her sister on the other. They stopped first at the bank, then at the grocery store, and finally entered Herbert Hurlingford's clothing emporium.

The experience was a terrific tonic, between Uncle Herbert's flabbergasted imitation of a codfish when Missy proceeded to buy men's shirts and trousers for herself, and James' tongue-tied terror when she bought lengths of apricot silk, lavender-blue taffeta, and cyclamen wool. Recovering somewhat, Herbert debated whether he should order the hussy from his premises; then when she paid for her purchases in gold, he changed his mind and humbly rang up the sale. Staggering as Missy's visit was, he really only had half a mind to pay to it, for the other half was occupied with what was going on up at the plant, where the extraordinary meeting of shareholders was taking place.

"You may deliver these to Missalonghi this afternoon, James," said Missy grandly, and slapped a gold sovereign down on the counter. "Here, this is for your trouble. Come, Mother, Aunt Octavia! Let us go to Aunt Julia's for lunch."

The three ladies of Missalonghi swept out of the shop more royally than they had swept in.

"Oh, this is such fun!" chuckled Octavia.

Missy was enjoying herself too, but less simply. She had her dress materials and her shirts and her trousers, and several pairs of pretty shoes into the bargain. She really didn't need anything else. If she kept a hundred pounds of that amazing thousand, it would be more than enough to last her a year. She would use the rest to buy Mother and Aunt Octavia a little pony-and-trap. Never again would they have to walk anywhere, or humble their pride by begging that a conveyance be sent for them. Yes, they should go to Alicia's wedding in style!

The money Julia had realized from the sale of her shares was already being spent; half her tearoom was roped off, and two workmen were toiling at stripping and sanding.

Once she ceased apologizing for the mess, Julia gathered her wits together sufficiently to absorb the full splendor of Missy's outfit. "It's a superb dress and hat, dear," she said, "but isn't the color a little flashy?"

"Definitely flashy," admitted Missy, without shame. "But oh, Aunt Julia, it suits me, don't you think?"

Yes, but does it suit my tearoom? was the question Julia burned to ask, then decided it would be unpardonable to criticize her benefactress. She ushered the ladies of Missalonghi to her very best table and shortly thereafter served them an assortment of sandwiches and cakes and a big pot of tea.

"I'm going to have a striped paper on the walls in cream and gold," she said, sitting down to join her guests, "and my chairs will be reupholstered in a matching brocade. I'm having the molding picked out in gilt, canaries in gold cages, and pots of tall palms everywhere. Let next door"—her head tilted scornfully toward the Olympus Café—"compete with *that!*"

Drusilla's mouth was open to unburden herself of the news that Missy was married to John Smith and that John Smith was a rich man rather than a jailbird, when Cornelia Hurlingford erupted through the doors and descended upon them.

Cornelia and Julia lived together above the Weeping Willow Tea Room. As well as sharing their living arrangements, the two maiden sisters also shared and relished every morsel of information garnered in their public occupations.

"Guess what?" Cornelia gasped, plumping herself down on a chair and forgetting she was supposed to be the formidably elegant sales dame of a snooty millinery establishment.

"What?" asked everyone, prepared to be impressed.

"Alicia ran off with Billy's chauffeur this morning!"

"What?"

"She did! She eloped! At *her* age! Oh, what a circus is going on at Aurelia's! Hysterics all over the place! Little Willie nearly tore the house apart looking for Alicia, because he refused to believe what her note to him said; and Billy was roaring like a gale, because he had to go to some important meeting at the plant when what he really wanted to do was set the police on to his chauffeur! They carted Aurelia off to bed as stiff as a board, and had to send for Uncle Neville. Oh, and Edmund is sitting on a chair, just twitching; and Ted and Randolph are trying to pull him together so he can go to the meeting. But the worst is that Alicia and the chauffeur went off in Billy's brand-new motorcar!"

Cornelia ended her breathless recital with a bellow of laughter; Missy joined her, as did the others, one by one, to ring a peal of glorious mirth over the events at Mon Repos. After that, everyone settled to a quieter but no less enjoyable dissection of Missy's marriage and Alicia's elopement, not to mention lunch.

JOHN Smith arrived at Missalonghi just before five o'clock, looking very pleased with himself. He shook his mother-in-law's hand with great affability but refrained from kissing her, a piece of good sense she heartily approved of. He also offered a handshake to Octavia, who, looking at him properly for the first time, had to admit that he was a fine figure of a man. Missy had nothing to be ashamed of in her choice of a life's partner.

He made himself easily at home in the kitchen and sniffed at the scent of roast lamb appreciatively.

"I hope you and Missy will stay to dinner?" asked Drusilla.

"We'd love to," he said.

He leaned back in his chair and raised one eyebrow at his wife, who was sitting opposite and just beaming at him with a pride in him his first wife had certainly never owned. What fools men were! They always went after the pretty women, when the homely ones were much better bets. However, she looked all right in that bright red getup, not beautiful, certainly not pretty, but interesting. In fact, she looked like the sort of woman most men would want to get to know because they weren't sure what went on inside. As she sat there sparking with life, it was difficult to believe she could die at any moment. His heart twisted—an odd sensation. Tomorrow, tomorrow! Don't think about it until it happens! You are beginning to dwell on it, and you mustn't! Don't think of her death sentence as a cosmic revenge on you!

Maybe if he could make her happy enough, it wouldn't happen at all. There were such things as miracles; he had seen one or two in his travels. Getting rid of his first wife undoubtedly fell into the category of a miracle.

"I want to talk to you ladies," he said, dragging his eyes and his mind away from his present wife.

Three faces turned to him with interest. Drusilla and Octavia ceased fussing at the stove and sat down.

"There was a shareholders' meeting at the Byron Bottle Company today," he said, "and management of the company has changed hands. In fact, it passed into my hands."

"*You?*" squeaked Missy. "Then you're the mystery buyer?"

"Yes."

"But why? Uncle Billy said the mystery buyer had outlaid the kind of money for shares that no one could ever get back!"

He smiled, not attractively; for the first time since meeting him Missy saw a different John Smith, a powerful and flinty John Smith, a John Smith who might not know the meaning of the word mercy. It didn't frighten her and it didn't take her aback; rather, it pleased her. Here was no defeated refugee from life's insistent pressures; here was no weakling.

"I had a bone to pick with the Hurlingfords," he replied. "Present company excluded, of course. But by and large, I have found the Hurlingfords so damned smug, so sure that their quasi-noble, free-settler English origins put them much higher than people like me, who have convict forebears on their mother's side and full Jew on their father's. I admit I set out to get the Hurlingfords and didn't care how much it cost me. Luckily, I have enough money to buy out a dozen Byron Bottle Companies without ever feeling the pinch."

"But you don't come from Byron," said Missy, bewildered.

"True. However, my first wife was a Hurlingford."

"Really! What was her name?" asked Drusilla, who was one of the clan experts on Hurlingford genealogy.

"Una."

Fortunately, Drusilla and Octavia were far too interested in what John Smith was saying, and John Smith himself was far too interested in saying it, to pay any attention to Missy.

She sat in stony stillness, unable to move the smallest part of her. Una. *Una!* How could her mother and aunt sit there so unresponsive to that name, when they had met her and entertained her in this very house?

"Una?" Drusilla was asking herself. "Let me see now. . . . Yes, she would have to be one of the Marcus Hurlingfords from Sydney! Humph! I never did meet her, but she died a long time ago, of course. A drowning accident, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said John Smith.

Was that it, then? Missy wondered. Was that why Una glowed? Was that why every time Missy had needed her she had been there? Was that why so many small incidents had happened so fortuitously in the library? The novels, all leading up to the one about the girl dying of heart trouble. The shares on the desk. The power of attorney forms. Una, the conveniently handy justice of the peace. The scarlet dress *exactly* as it had flowered in Missy's imagination, and exactly the right size too. The curious significance she had managed to give all her words, so that they sank into Missy like water into parched soil and germinated richly. Dear, radiant Una! Missy couldn't help smiling. How true that the second wife must always contend with the ghost of the first!

"But her married name definitely wasn't Smith," Drusilla was saying. "It was much more unusual, like Cardmom or Terebinth. He was a very rich man, as I recollect, which was the only reason the second Sir William approved the match. Yes, I see how they would have insulted you, if you were he."

"I was he, and they did indeed insult me."

"*We*," said Drusilla, reaching out her hand to clasp his, "are delighted to welcome you into this branch of the family, John."

The hard John Smith had gone, for the eyes resting on his mother-in-law were soft, amused in a gentle way. "Thank you. I've changed my name, of course, and I'd prefer you didn't speak of all this ancient history."

"It will go no further than Missalonghi," said Drusilla.

"Poor thing, Una drowning like that," said Octavia, shaking her head. "It must have hit you hard, John. Still, I'm glad things have turned out the way they have, the bottling plant and all. And isn't it interesting that you've gone and married another Hurlingford? I think Missy will make you very happy."

He grinned and reached across the table to take hold of Missy's cold, clammy hand. "Yes, I think she will too." He kissed the trembling fingers; then he released the hand and gave all his attention to Drusilla and Octavia.

"Anyway, I'm in control of the Byron Bottle Company, and I want to make some much needed changes. Naturally I shall sit as chairman of the board of directors and Missy will be my vice-chairman, but I also require eight other directors. Now, I plan to do something so different that when I announced my intentions, I acquired a few more shares! Sir William, Edmund Marshall, the brothers Maxwell and Herbert Hurlingford, and some dozen others sold out to me when the meeting concluded. Their spleen got the better of their judgment, which only confirms what I've suspected for a very long time—they're fools. The Byron Bottle Company is going to get bigger and better! It's going to become more civic-minded, and it's going to diversify its interests."

He laughed, shrugged. "Well, no point in dwelling on the likes of Sir William Hurlingford, is there? I want *women* on my board, and I want to start with you two ladies and the Misses Julia and Cornelia Hurlingford. All of you have coped magnificently with your hardships, and you certainly don't lack courage."

He lifted an eyebrow at Drusilla and Octavia, who were listening to him in spellbound silence. "So? Are you interested in my offer? Naturally you'll be paid directors' fees."

"But we don't know what to do!" cried Octavia.

"Most boards don't, so that's no handicap. I know you'll look at hoary problems with fresh eyes, and new problems with the kind of unorthodoxy a usual board can't match."

He looked at Drusilla sternly. "I'm waiting on your answer, Mother. Are you going to join my board, or not?"

Drusilla shut her gaping mouth with an audible snap. "Oh, indeed I am! And so are the others, I'll see to that."

"I must be dreaming," said Octavia.

"Not at all," said Drusilla, at her most majestic. "This is real. The ladies of Missalonghi have come into their own at last."

"What a day!" sighed Octavia.

What a day, indeed. The last of it was going on outside the open back door, which faced west. So did Missy's chair. She could see the great fanning ribbons of high cloud dyed as scarlet as her dress, and the apple-green sky between them, and the mass of blossom on the fruit trees in the orchard, drifts of white and pink gone pinker in that lovely waning sun. But her mind and her eyes, normally so receptive to the natural beauty of the world, were not preoccupied with that glory. For Una was standing in the doorway, smiling at her. Una. Oh, Una!

"Don't ever tell him about your heart trouble, Missy. Let him believe his love and care cured you." Una chuckled gleefully. "He's a darling man, but he has a terrible temper! No man likes to be the dupe of a woman, and he's already had a fair taste of that. So mark what I say—don't ever, ever tell him."

"You're leaving," said Missy desolately.

"I certainly am, darling! I've done what I was sent to do, and now I'm going to take a well-deserved rest on the softest, fattest, pinkest, *champagniest* cloud I can find."

"I can't do it without you, Una!"

"Nonsense, darling, of course you can. Just be good to him and you can't go wrong. That is, as long as you heed my warning—*don't ever tell him the truth!*"

That exquisite radiance welling from within Una had fused with the last of the sun; she stood a moment longer in the doorway with the light pouring through her; then she was gone.

"Missy! Missy! Missy! Are you all right? Are you in pain? Missy! For heaven's sake, answer me!"

John Smith was standing over her, chafing her hands, a look of desperate horror in his eyes.

She managed to smile up at him. "I'm quite all right, John, truly. It's been the day. Too much happiness!"

"You'd better get used to too much happiness, my love, because I swear I shall drown you in it," he said, and caught his breath. "You're my second chance, Missalonghi Smith."

A chill breeze puffed in through the open door, and just before Drusilla reached to shut it out, it whispered for Missy's ears alone, "Never tell him! Oh, please, *never* tell him!"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"Thirteen has always been my lucky number," says Colleen McCullough, "and Friday the thirteenth is my lucky day." It's no wonder. Back in 1975 she was a neurophysiologist at Yale University's School of Medicine with one novel to her credit. On Friday, June 13, she sat down at her typewriter and began pounding out an epic saga about her native Australia. After a rigorous year, working in the lab by day and writing each night, she finished *The Thorn Birds*. The book catapulted onto the best-seller lists and changed her life.

Colleen McCullough

In her forties and still single, the author soon moved to tiny Norfolk Island, a thousand miles off the Australian mainland. It was beautiful and peaceful—and a little lonely. Then one day Ric Robinson came by to paint her house. He was, in fact, a palm planter by profession, and a descendant of one of the famous *Bounty* mutineers whose families had settled the island. Following a two-year courtship, they were married on—you guessed it—Friday, April 13, 1984. Today they live on a property called Out Yenna (a Norfolk Island name meaning very remote). McCullough is an expert cook, and the couple grow their own vegetables. The island also abounds in such tropical fruits as mangoes, guavas and pineapples.

One thing has not changed. McCullough still works at breakneck speed in marathon writing sessions that sometimes last all night. A perfectionist, she put *The Ladies of Missalonghi* through ten complete drafts. Where do her ideas come from? "Everything's grist for the mill," she says. "I'm interested in what makes people tick, and I know a lot about spinsters, mostly from my own experience." She also spent holidays in the spectacular Blue Mountains as a child, and fictional Byron is a combination of several towns there. And what about the mysteriously illusive Una? "Oh," she says, chuckling, "my publisher wanted a ghost story."

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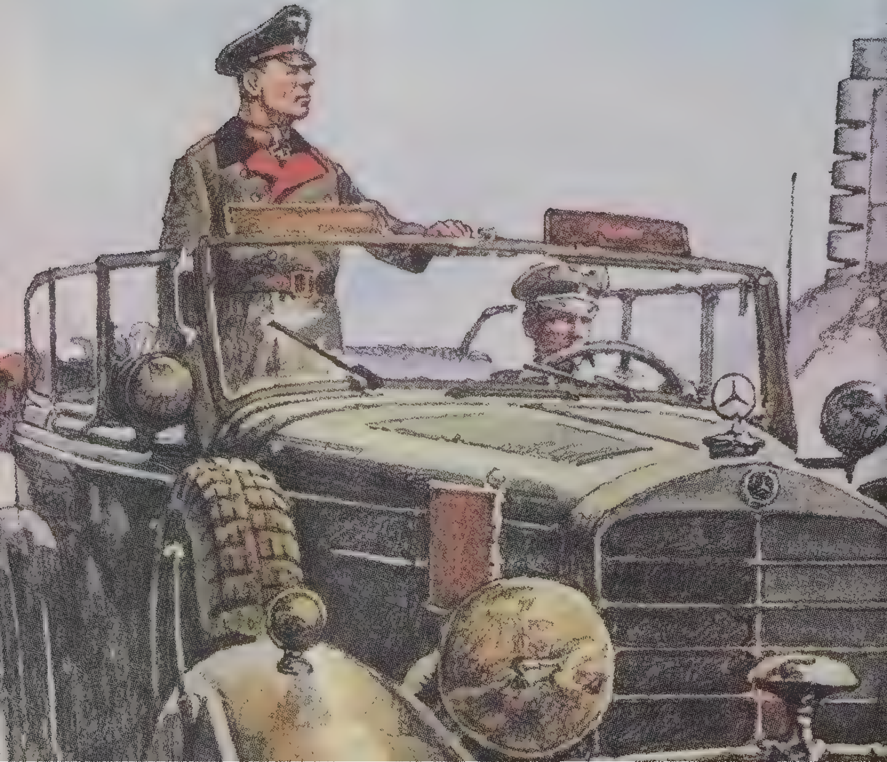
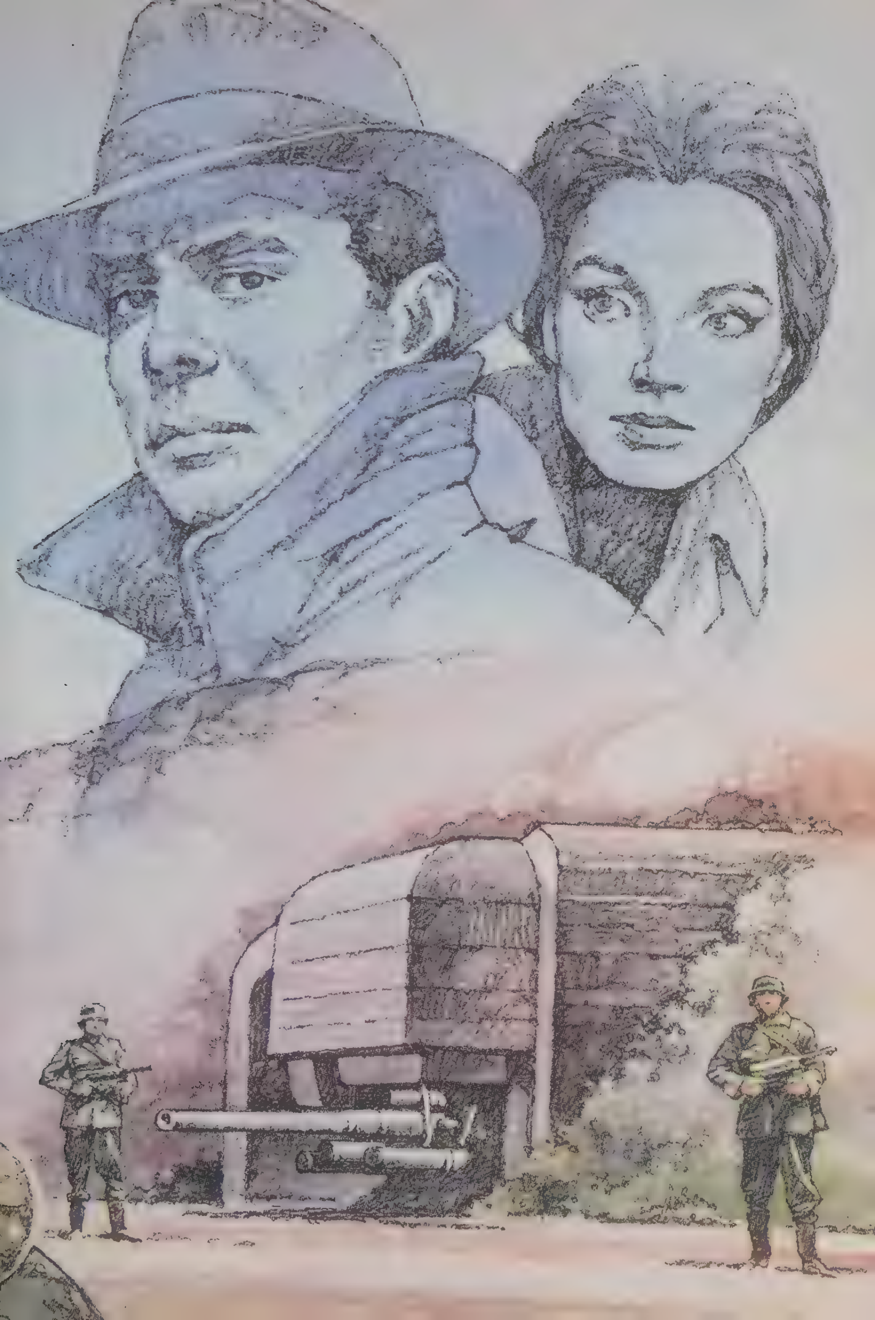
NIGHT of the FOX

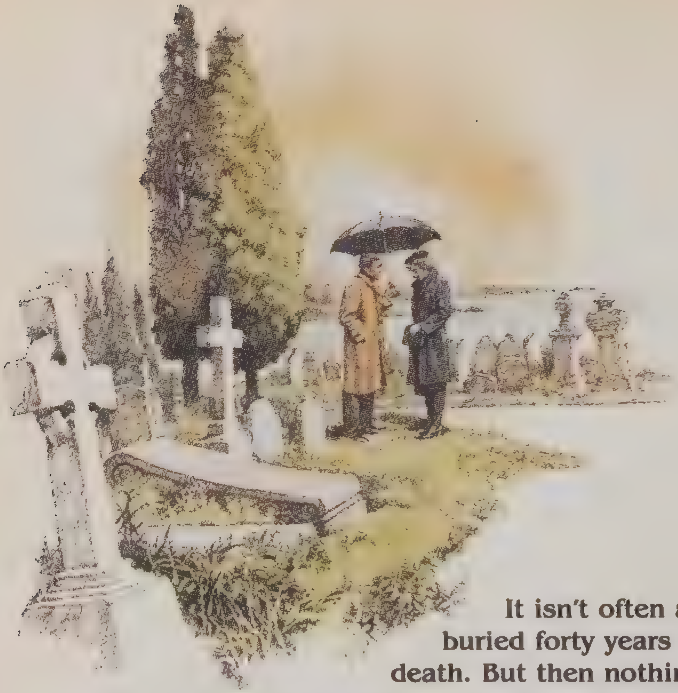
A condensation of the novel by

JACK HIGGINS

Illustrated by Gino D'Achille







It isn't often a man is buried forty years after his death. But then nothing about Harry Martineau had ever been ordinary. A master British spy, he vanished during World War II, and only Sarah Drayton knows why. She fell in love with him on the most perilous mission of his career. And only now can she tell the startling truth. . . .
The story begins in April 1944. A wounded American, with detailed knowledge of D-Day plans, falls into Nazi hands. With Allied victory at stake, he *must* be found. Disguised as an SS officer, Martineau is soon swept into a deadly game of bluff and counterbluff—his opponent none other than Field Marshal Rommel, the Desert Fox himself!

"Higgins' most tingling thriller since *The Eagle Has Landed."—Publishers Weekly*

JERSEY 1985

Chapter One

The Romans used to think that the souls of the departed stayed near their tombs. It was easy to believe that on a cold March morning, with a sky so black that it was as if night were about to fall.

I stood in the granite archway and looked in at the graveyard. The notice board said Parish Church of St. Brelade, and the place was crammed with headstones and tombs. Here and there a granite cross reared up. There was a winged angel on the far side; I noticed that, and then thunder rumbled on the horizon and rain swept in across the bay.

I put up my umbrella and ventured out from under the arch. Last Sunday in Boston I'd never even heard of the British Channel Islands off the coast of France or the island of Jersey. Now it was Thursday, and here I was, having traveled halfway around the world to seek the final answer to something that had taken three years out of my life.

As I moved through the tombstones toward the old granite church, pausing to look out over the bay, I heard voices. Turning, I saw two men in cloth caps crouching under a cypress tree by the far wall. They stood up and walked away, and I noticed they were carrying spades. I crossed to the wall, and there was a freshly dug grave, covered with a tarpaulin. I don't think I've ever felt so excited. It was as if it had been waiting for me.

I turned and walked past the headstones to the entrance of the church, opened the door and went inside. I'd expected a place of darkness and gloom, but the lights were on, and it was really very beautiful, the vaulted ceiling unusual in that it was constructed of granite; no evidence of wooden beams there at all. I walked toward the altar and stood for a moment, looking around, aware of the quiet. There was the click of a door opening, and then closing. A man approached.

He had white hair and eyes of the palest blue. He wore a black cassock and carried a raincoat over one arm. His voice was dry and very old, and there was a hint of Irish to it when he spoke. "Can I help you? My name is Cullen. Canon Donald Cullen."

I shook hands. He had a surprisingly firm grip. "Alan Stacey."

"You're an American?"

"Yes," I said. "My first visit to Jersey. Until a few days ago I never knew the place existed. Like most Americans, I'd only heard of *New* Jersey."

He smiled, and we moved toward the door. "You've chosen a bad time of the year for your first visit. Jersey can be one of the most desirable places on earth, but not usually during March."

"I didn't have much choice," I said. "I came because you're burying someone here today. Harry Martineau."

He had started to pull on his raincoat and paused in surprise. "That's right. At two o'clock this afternoon. Are you a relative?"

"Not exactly, although I sometimes feel as if I am. I'm an assistant professor of philosophy at Harvard. I've been working on a biography of Martineau for the past three years."

"I see." He opened the door and we went out onto the porch.

"Do you know much about him?" I asked.

"Very little, beyond the extraordinary way he met his end."

"And the even more extraordinary circumstances of his last rites," I said. "After all, Canon, it isn't often you get to bury a man forty years after his death."

CANON Cullen's bungalow was at the other end of St. Brelade's Bay, close to L'Horizon Hotel, where I was staying. It was small and unpretentious, but the living room was surprisingly large, comfortable and cluttered. Two walls were lined with books.

Sliding windows looked out onto a terrace, a small garden and the bay beyond. The wind was lifting the sea into whitecaps, and rain rattled against the windows.

My host came in from the kitchen and put a tray on a small table by the fire. He poured me a cup of tea as I sat down. The silence hung between us. He raised his cup and drank precisely, waiting.

"You're very comfortable here," I said.

"Yes," he said. "I do very well. Lonely, of course. The great weakness of all human beings, Professor Stacey, is that we all need somebody." He put his cup down. "I spent three years in Jersey as a boy and grew to love the place. When I retired, it seemed an obvious choice."

He took out a pipe and started to fill it from a worn leather pouch. "So," he said briskly. "Tell me about Martineau."

"Do you know much about him?"

"I'd never heard of the man until a few days ago when my good friend Dr. Drayton came to see me and told me the body was being shipped from London for burial here."

"You're aware of the manner of his death?" I asked.

"In a plane crash in 1945."

"January 1945, to be exact. The RAF had a unit called the Enemy Aircraft Flight during the Second World War. They flew captured German planes to evaluate their performance. Harry Martineau worked for the Ministry of Economic Warfare. He was declared missing while traveling as an observer for the EAF in an Arado 96. That's a German training plane. It was always believed to have gone down in the sea, but two weeks ago it was found during excavations at a building site in an Essex marsh."

"And Martineau and the pilot were still inside?"

"What was left of them. For some reason the authorities kept a low profile on the affair. News didn't filter through to me until last weekend. I caught the first plane out."

He nodded. "You say you've been working on a biography of him. What makes him so special? As I told you, I'd never even heard his name before."

"Nor have the general public," I said. "But in the '30s he was considered one of the most brilliant and innovative minds in his field, which was moral philosophy."

"An interesting study," the canon said.

"For a fascinating man. He was born in Boston. His father was in shipping. Wealthy, but not outrageously so. His mother, although born in New York, was of German parentage."

I got up and walked to the window, thinking hard as I peered out. "Martineau went to Harvard, did a doctorate at Heidelberg and was a Rhodes scholar, at Oxford. He was later made a fellow there, at Trinity College, and became Croxley Professor of Moral Philosophy at the age of thirty-eight."

"A remarkable achievement," Cullen said.

I turned. "But the strange thing is that here was a man who was questioning everything. Turning his whole field upside down. Then the war broke out, and the rest is silence."

"Silence?"

"Oh, he left Oxford. We know that. Worked for the government, as I told you. Many academics did that. But the tragedy was that he seems to have stopped academic work altogether after September 1939. No more papers, and the book he'd been writing was left unfinished." I went back and sat down.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve. Cullen got up, moved to the sideboard and poured whiskey into two glasses. He brought them back and handed me one. "And so, Professor, what about the rest?"

"The rest?"

"Priests are supposed to be ingenuous souls who know nothing of the reality of life," he said. "Rubbish, of course. After fifty-two years as a priest, one learns to know when someone is not telling you everything." He put a match to his pipe and puffed away. "Which applies to you, my friend, unless I'm very mistaken."

I took a deep breath. "He was in a German Luftwaffe uniform when they found him. Both he and the pilot."

"How do you know that?"

"I have a friend who's with the CIA at our embassy in London. He found out something else as well. The report about that Arado plane being from the EAF. That's suspect too."

"Why?"

"Because they always carried RAF rondelle insignias, and this one still had Luftwaffe markings."

The old man frowned. "And you couldn't get any more information from official sources?"

"None at all. Ridiculous though it may seem, Martineau and that flight are still covered by some wartime security classification. All I *did* discover was that Martineau was awarded the Distinguished Service Order in 1944. No information about what he'd done to earn it." I shrugged. "Nothing makes much sense. Martineau and Jersey, for example. To the best of my knowledge he never visited the place." I swallowed the rest of my whiskey. "Martineau has no living relatives and he never married, so tell me, who is this Dr. Drayton of yours? He must have a lot of pull with the Ministry of Defense to get them to release the body to him."

"You're absolutely right," Canon Cullen said. "In all respects but one. Dr. Drayton is not a he, but a she. Dr. Sarah Drayton, to be precise." He raised his glass to toast me.

"I AM the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Cullen sounded more Irish as he lifted his voice against the heavy rain. He wore a dark cloak over his vestments, and one of the undertaker's men stood beside him holding an umbrella.

There was only one mourner, Sarah Drayton, standing on the other side of the open grave. She looked perhaps forty-eight or fifty, although as I discovered later she was sixty; small and with a figure still trim, in a black suit and hat. Her hair was short and iron gray. She was not in any way conventionally beautiful, with a mouth that was rather too large and hazel eyes above wide cheekbones. But it was a face of considerable character, and there was an extraordinary stillness to her.

I stayed back under the shelter of the trees, getting thoroughly damp in spite of my umbrella. Cullen concluded the service, then moved toward her and spoke briefly. She kissed him on the cheek, and he turned and walked away to the church, followed by the undertakers.

She stayed at the graveside for a while, and the two gravediggers waited respectfully a few yards away. She ignored me as I moved forward.

"Dr. Drayton?" I said. "I'm sorry to intrude. My name is Alan Stacey. I wonder if I might have a few words?"

Her voice was calm and beautifully modulated. She said, without looking at me, "I know very well who you are, Professor Stacey. I've been expecting you at any time these past three years." She turned and smiled, and suddenly looked enchanting and about twenty years of age. "We really should get out of this rain before it does us both a mischief. My car is in the road outside. I think you'd better come back for a drink."

THE house was no more than five minutes away. It was Victorian, and it stood in about an acre of well-tended garden, surrounded by beech trees through which one could see the bay far below. As we went up the steps, the door was opened instantly by a somber-looking, silver-haired man in a black alpaca jacket.

"Ah, Vito," Dr. Drayton said as he took her coat. "This is Professor Stacey."

"Professore." He bowed slightly.

"We'll have coffee later," she said. "I'll see to the drinks."

"Of course, Contessa." He turned and left us.

"Contessa?" I asked.

"Oh, don't listen to Vito." She dismissed my query politely but firmly. "He's a terrible snob. This way."

She opened a double mahogany door and led the way into a large library. The walls were lined with books, and French windows looked out to the garden. There was an Adam fireplace, with a fire burning brightly in the basket grate, and a grand piano, the top crammed with photos, mostly in silver frames.

"Scotch all right for you?" she asked.

"Fine."

She busied herself at the drinks tray and handed me a glass. "I've known about you ever since you started work on Harry."

"Who told you about me?"

"Oh, friends," she said. "From the old days. The kind who get to know things."

"You must have influence," I said. "Nobody seems to want to answer any of my questions at the Ministry of Defense and yet they released the body to you."

She sat in a wing chair by the fire, crossing slim legs. "Have you ever heard of SOE, Professor?"

"Of course," I said. "Special Operations Executive. Set up by British intelligence in 1940 on Churchill's instructions to coordinate resistance in Europe."

Sarah Drayton took a cigarette from a silver box and lit it. "I worked for them."

I was astonished. "But you can't have been more than a child."

"Nineteen," she said. "In 1944."

"And Martineau?"

"Look on the piano," she said. "The end photo."

I crossed to the piano and picked up the photo. Her face jumped out at me, strangely unchanged except in one respect. Her hair was startlingly blond and marcelled—that's the term I think they used to use for waved hair. She wore one of those coats from the wartime period, with big shoulders, tight at the waist.

The man standing next to her was of medium height and wore a leather military trench coat, hands thrust deep into the pockets. His face was shadowed by a dark slouch hat. The eyes were dark, no expression in them at all, and his smile had a kind of ruthless charm. He looked thoroughly dangerous.

Sarah Drayton got up and joined me. "Not much like the Croxley Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford there, is he?"

"Where was it taken?" I asked.

"In Jersey. Not too far from here. May 1944."

"But I've been in Jersey long enough to know that it was occupied by the Germans at that time," I said.

"Very much so."

"And Martineau was here? With you?"

She crossed to a Georgian desk, opened a drawer and took out several old snapshots. She passed one to me. "This one I don't keep on top of the piano, for obvious reasons."

She was dressed pretty much as she had been in the other photo, and Martineau wore the same leather trench coat. The only difference was the SS uniform underneath, the silver death's-head badge on his cap. "Standartenführer Max Vogel," she said. "Colonel, to you. He looks rather dashing, doesn't he?"

"Good Lord," I said. "What is all this?"

She didn't answer, but simply passed me another photo. A group of German officers. In front of them stood two men on their own. One was Martineau in SS uniform, but it was the other who took my breath away. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. The Desert Fox himself.

"Was that taken here too?"

"Oh, yes." She put the photos back in the desk and picked up my glass. "I think you could do with another drink."

"Yes, I believe I could. Do I get an explanation?"

"Why not?" she said, and turned as rain drummed against the French windows. "I can't think of anything better to do on an afternoon like this, can you?"

LONDON 1944

Chapter Two

IT STARTED with a telephone call received by Brigadier Dougal Munro at his London flat, ten minutes' walk from SOE headquarters, on Baker Street. As head of Section D at SOE, Munro had two phones by his bed, one routed straight to his office. It was this that woke him at four a.m. on April 28, 1944.

He listened, face grave, then swore softly. "I'll be right over."

Within five minutes he was hurrying along the deserted street. He was sixty-five, a squat, powerful-looking man with white hair, his round face set off by steel-rimmed spectacles. He wore an old Burberry raincoat and carried an umbrella.

He turned in at the entrance of Baker Street, nodded to the night guard and went straight to his office. Captain Jack Carter, his night duty officer, was seated behind his desk.

"Is there any tea, Jack?"

"Thermos flask on the map table, sir."

Munro unscrewed the flask, poured a cup and drank. "Oh, that's foul, but at least it's hot. Right, get on with it."

Carter got up and walked over to a map of southwest England on the table, showing Devon, Cornwall and the English Channel.

"Exercise Tiger, sir," he said. "You remember the details?"

"Practice landings for Overlord."

"That's right. Here in Lyme Bay, in Devon, there's a place called Slapton Sands. It bears enough similarities to the beach we've designated Utah in the Normandy landings to make it invaluable for training purposes. As you know, most of the young Americans going in have no combat experience. Last night's convoy consisted of eight landing craft from Plymouth and Brixham. Under naval escort, of course."

There was a pause. Munro said, "Tell me the worst."

"They were attacked at sea by German E-boats. Two landing craft sunk. Others torpedoed and damaged. Around two hundred sailors and four hundred soldiers missing."

"Are you trying to tell me we lost six hundred servicemen last night? And we haven't even started the invasion of Europe?"

"I'm afraid so."

Munro walked restlessly across the room and stood at the window. "Were there any Bigots among those officers lost?"

"Three, sir."

"Dear God, I warned them. I warned them about this," Munro said. "No Bigot to undertake hazardous duty in any way."

Bigot was an intelligence classification above Most Secret. Bigots knew what others did not—the details of the Allied invasion of Europe.

"Has Eisenhower been told?"

"He's in town, sir, at Hayes Lodge. He wants to see you at breakfast. Eight o'clock."

Munro shook his head. "Wouldn't it be ironic if the greatest invasion in history had to be called off because one man with all the right information fell into the wrong hands?"

"I don't think it's likely that any of those missing were picked up by the Germans, sir. I gather the E-boats attacked, then got out fast. Typical hit and run. A lot of darkness and confusion on both sides. And the weather isn't too good. The way the currents are, most of the bodies should come ashore."

"I pray that you're right, Jack," Dougal Munro said fervently.

BUT at that precise moment Colonel Hugh Kelso was more afraid than he had ever been in his life; cold and wet and in terrible pain. He lay huddled in the bottom of a life raft about a mile off the Devon coast, a contrary current carrying him fast toward Start Point, on the southernmost tip of Lyme Bay. Beyond lay the open waters of the English Channel.

Kelso was forty-two, married, with two daughters. A civil engineer, he had been drafted into the engineering corps in 1942. His experience with the engineering problems involved in beach landings on various South Pacific islands had earned him a transfer to England to work on the preparation for the Normandy invasion. Six weeks previously, under cover of darkness, Kelso had actually visited the Normandy beach code-named Utah to check on the suitability of the terrain for vehicles. It had therefore seemed sensible to have him aboard when LST 31 sailed from Plymouth to take part in Exercise Tiger.

Like everyone else on the boat, Kelso had been totally surprised by the attack. A number of flares had been noticed in the distance, which had been assumed to come from British escorts. Then the first torpedo had struck, and the night had become a living hell of burning oil and screaming men. The force of the explosion had thrown Kelso into the sea. His life jacket kept him afloat, but he had lost consciousness, coming to his senses to find himself being pulled through the icy water.

The flames were a hundred yards away, and in the reflected light he had become aware of an oil-streaked face.

"You're okay, sir. Just hang on. There's a life raft here."

The life raft loomed out of the darkness—round, fat, orange, riding high in the water and intended to carry as many as ten men. There was a canopy on top to protect the occupants from wind and weather. The entrance flap was open.

"I'll get you in, sir. Then I'll go back for some more. Up you go."

Kelso felt weak, but his unknown friend was strong. He pushed hard, shoving Kelso headfirst through the flap. And then Kelso was aware of the pain in his right leg, worse than anything he had ever known. He screamed and fainted.

When he came to, he was numb with cold. There was no sign of his unknown friend. He peered out through the open flap. Spray dashed in his face. There was no light anywhere. He checked the luminous dial of his waterproof watch. It was almost five a.m. Then he remembered that these life rafts carried an emergency kit. As he turned to feel for it, the pain in his leg started again. He gritted his teeth as his hands found the box and opened the lid.

There was a waterproof flashlight inside. He switched it on. He was alone, as he had thought, in the orange cave, water slopping around him. His right trouser leg was torn below the knee, and when he gingerly put his hand inside, he could feel the raised edges of broken bone.

There was also a Very pistol in the box, and he fingered it for a moment. It seemed the obvious thing to send up a flare, but then he paused. What if the German naval units that had attacked them were still in the area? He was, after all, a Bigot. In a matter of weeks an armada of five thousand ships would sail across the narrow waters of the English Channel, and Kelso knew time and place. No, better to wait until dawn.

His leg was really hurting now. He rummaged in the box and found the medical kit with its morphine supplies. He jabbed one injection into his leg and, after a moment's hesitation, another. Then he found the bailer and wearily started to throw water out through the open flap. Lord, but he was tired. Too much morphine perhaps, but at least the pain had dulled. He leaned back and was suddenly asleep.

EISENHOWER was seated in the Regency bow window of the library at Hayes Lodge having a breakfast of poached eggs, toast and coffee when a young aide showed Dougal Munro in.

"Leave us, Captain," the general said, and the aide withdrew. "Have you eaten, Brigadier?"

"I haven't eaten breakfast for years, General," said Munro.

For a moment Eisenhower's face was illuminated by that famous smile. "Which shows you aren't an old military hand. You prefer tea, don't you? You'll find it on the sideboard. Help yourself, then tell me what you know of this wretched business."

Munro helped himself to tea and sat in the window seat and gave Eisenhower a brief résumé of the night's events.

"But surely the naval escorts should have been able to prevent such a thing happening," the general said.

Munro shrugged. "The Germans obviously slipped out of Cherbourg with their silencers on and their radar switched off.

On their approach they fired off parachute flares, so the people in the convoy assumed they were ours."

"Dammit, you never assume anything in this game. I'm tired of telling people that." Eisenhower stood up and went to the fire. "Bodies coming ashore by the hundred, so they tell me."

"I'm afraid that's right."

"Needless to say, Brigadier, this whole thing stays under wraps. If it got out, so close to the invasion, it could have a terrible effect on morale."

"I agree." Munro hesitated, then said carefully, "There is the question of the Bigots, General. There were three in all. Two of the bodies have already been recovered. The third"—Munro took a file from his briefcase and held it out—"is still missing."

Eisenhower took the file and read it quickly. "Colonel Hugh Kelso." His face darkened. "I know Kelso personally. He checked out a beach in Normandy only weeks ago." The American general sighed. "He knows both when we're going and where. The implications are past belief."

"We've men on the beaches around Slapton looking for him now, General. I think his body may well turn up with the rest."

Eisenhower said sharply, "Some of those bodies will never come in on the tide. I know that and so do you, and if Kelso is one of them, we can never be certain that he wasn't picked up by the enemy." He walked to the window. Rain dashed against the pane. "What a day," he said morosely.

HITLER was beside himself with rage, pacing up and down in the map room at Wolf's Lair, his underground headquarters deep in the forests of East Prussia. "Again and yet again these assassins try." He turned on Rattenhuber, the commander of the resident SS guard. "And you, Oberführer? What about you? Sworn to protect my safety."

"My Führer," Rattenhuber stammered. "What can I say?"

"Nothing!" Hitler stormed and turned on the other officers in the room. "You say nothing of use to me—none of you."

In the shocked silence it was Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the SS, who spoke. "That there has been negligence is true, my Führer, but surely in the failure of this dastardly attempt on your life we see further proof of the certainty of your own destiny. Further proof of Germany's inevitable victory under your inspired guidance."

Hitler's eyes blazed. "As always, Reichsführer, *you* see. You are the only one who does." He turned on the others. "Get out, all of you. I wish to talk to the Reichsführer alone."

They went without a murmur, while Hitler stood staring down at the map desk, hands clasped behind him. "There is a plot, am I not right?" he said. "A general conspiracy to destroy me?"

"Not so much a general conspiracy as a conspiracy of generals."

Hitler turned sharply. "Are you certain?"

"Oh, yes. But proof—that is something else."

Hitler nodded. "This Captain Koenig, the traitor who tried to bring a time bomb into my headquarters this morning, he was an aide to General Olbricht. Is Olbricht one of those you suspect?" Himmler nodded. "And the others?"

"Generals Stieff, Wagner, von Hase, Lindemann. Several more, all being closely watched."

Hitler stayed remarkably cool. "Traitors, each and every one. A noose each when the time comes. No one higher, though? It would seem our field marshals are loyal, at least."

"I wish I could confirm that, my Führer, but there is one who is suspect. I would be failing in my duty if I did not tell you."

"Then tell me."

"Rommel."

Hitler smiled a ghastly smile that was almost one of triumph. "So, the Desert Fox wishes to play games."

"I'm almost certain of it."

"The people's hero," Hitler said. "We must handle him carefully, wouldn't you say?"

"Or outfox him, my Führer," Himmler said softly.

"Outfox him. Outfox the Desert Fox." Hitler smiled delightedly. "Yes, I like that, Reichsführer. I like that very much indeed."

HUGH Kelso slept until noon, and when he awoke he was very sick. He turned over in the violently pitching life raft and pulled down the zipper of the entrance flap. His heart sank. There was nothing but sea. The sky was black, heavy with rain, and there was no hint of land anywhere. He was well out in the English Channel; so much was obvious. If he drifted straight across, he'd hit the coast of France, possibly the Cherbourg peninsula. Below that, in the Gulf of St.-Malo, were the Channel Islands. He didn't know much about them except that they were British and occupied by the enemy.

He got the Very pistol out and fired an orange distress flare. There was seldom any German naval traffic in the Channel during daylight. They tended to keep to the inshore run behind their minefields. He fired another flare, and then water cascaded in through the flap and he hurriedly zipped it up. His leg was on fire again. He got another morphine ampoule and injected himself. After a while he pillowed his head on his hands and slept.

Outside, the sea lifted as the afternoon wore on. By five o'clock the wind was blowing southwesterly, turning him away from the French coast and the Cherbourg peninsula, so that by six o'clock he was ten miles to the east of the island of Guernsey.

Kelso was aware of none of these things. He awoke around seven with a high temperature, washed his face with a little water, then dropped into something approaching a coma.

As COMMANDER of Army Group B, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was responsible for the Atlantic Wall defenses, and his sole task now was to defeat any Allied attempt to land in northern France. Since taking command in January, he had strengthened the coastal defenses to an incredible degree, tramping the beaches himself, impressing his own energetic presence on everyone from divisional commanders to the lowliest soldier.

His headquarters seemed permanently on the move, and he had an uncomfortable habit of turning up unexpectedly in his familiar black Mercedes, accompanied only by his driver and his most trusted aide from his Afrika Korps days, Major Konrad Hofer.

About the time that Hugh Kelso was drifting past the east coast of Guernsey, Rommel was sitting down to dinner with the officers of the 21st Parachute Regiment in a château at Campeaux, some ten miles from St.-Lô, in Normandy.

His primary reason for being in the area was sound enough. The high command believed that the Allied invasion, when it came, would take place near the Pas de Calais, just south of Belgium. Rommel disagreed and had made it clear that if he were Eisenhower, he would strike for Normandy. None of this had done anything for his popularity in Berlin, but Rommel didn't care about that anymore. The war was lost. The only thing that was uncertain was how long it would take.

Which brought him to his second reason for being in Normandy. He was involved in a dangerous game, and it paid to keep on the move. Since taking command of Army Group B, he had renewed old friendships with General von Stülpnagel, military governor of France, and General Alexander von Falkenhausen. Both were involved, along with Colonel Klaus von Stauffenberg, in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler and save Germany from disaster. It had not taken them long to bring Rommel to their point of view.

They had all been aware of the projected assassination attempt at Wolf's Lair that morning. Rommel had already sent Konrad Hofer to General Olbricht's headquarters in Berlin to await the outcome, but so far there had been no news from him.

Now Colonel Halder, commanding the 21st Parachute Regiment, stood to offer a toast. "Gentlemen . . . to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox himself, who honors us tonight."

They drained their glasses, then applauded Rommel, cheering wildly. He was immensely touched. Halder then said, "The men have arranged a little entertainment in your honor, Field Marshal. We were hoping you might be willing to attend."

"But of course. Delighted."

A door opened at the back of the room and Konrad Hofer entered. He looked tired and badly needed a shave. "Ah, Konrad, there you are," Rommel called as the man approached him. "Come and have a glass of champagne. You look as if you could do with it. Good flight?"

"Terrible." Hofer swallowed the champagne gratefully.

"My dear boy, have a shower and we'll see if they can make you a sandwich." Rommel turned to Colonel Halder. "Can you delay this little show for half an hour?"

"That will be no problem, Field Marshal."

"Good. We'll see you later, then." Rommel walked out, followed by Hofer.

As soon as the bedroom door was closed, Hofer turned in agitation. "It was the worst kind of mess. All that fool Koenig managed to do was blow himself up outside the main gate."

"That seems rather careless of him," Rommel said dryly. "Now calm yourself, Konrad, and go take your shower."

Hofer disappeared into the bathroom. While he waited, Rommel straightened his uniform, examining himself in the mirror. He was fifty-three, stocky and thickset, with strong features, and there was a power to the man, a force that was almost electric. His uniform was simple enough, his only decorations the Pour le Mérite—the famous Blue Max—and the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds, both of which hung around his neck. One hardly needed anything else if one had those.

Hofer soon emerged in a bathrobe, toweling his hair. "Olbricht and the others are furious, and I don't blame them. The Gestapo or the SD could be on to this at any time."

"How was von Stauffenberg?" Rommel asked.

"As determined as ever. He suggests you meet with Generals von Stülpnagel and Falkenhausen within the next few days."

"I'll see what I can do."

"I'm not so sure it's a good idea. If Himmler does have his suspicions about you, you could be under surveillance already."

"Oh, I'll think of something," Rommel said. "Now, hurry up. The men are putting on a little show for me, and I don't want to disappoint them."

THE show was presented on a small stage in the main hall of the château. Rommel, Hofer and the regimental officers sat on chairs at the front; the men stood behind them.

A young corporal came on, bowed and sat down at a grand piano and played a selection of light music. There was polite applause. Then the curtains parted to reveal the regimental choir, singing lustily. There were cheers from the back of the hall, and everyone started to join in, including the officers. The curtain came down to a storm of clapping, and there was a pause.

"Brilliant," said Rommel. "Is there more?"

"Yes, Herr Field Marshal. Something very special."

There was a steady, muted drumroll. The curtain rose to reveal subdued lighting. As the choir started to sing the song of the Afrika Korps from the side of the stage, Rommel walked on. And it was quite unmistakably he. The cap with the desert goggles, the old leather greatcoat, one gloved hand holding the field marshal's baton, the other arrogantly on the hip. The voice, when he spoke, was perfect as he delivered a few lines of his famous battlefield speech before El Alamein.

"I know I haven't offered you much. Sand, heat and scorpions, but we've shared them together. One more push and it's Cairo, and if we fail . . . well, we tried—together."

There was total silence in the hall as Colonel Halder glanced anxiously at Rommel. "Field Marshal, I hope you're not offended."

"Offended? I think he's marvelous," Rommel said, and jumped to his feet. "Bravo!" he called, and behind him the audience joined in the chorus of the Afrika Korps song, cheering wildly.

IN THE makeshift dressing room next to the kitchen, Corporal Erich Berger slumped into a chair and stared at himself in the mirror. His heart was beating fast and he was sweating. It was a terrible strain for any actor to perform in front of the man he was taking off. And such a man. The most popular soldier in Germany.

"Not bad, Heini," he said softly. "*Mazel tov.*" He took a bottle of schnapps from a drawer, drew the cork and swallowed some.

A Yiddish phrase on the lips of a German corporal might have seemed strange to anyone who had overheard. His secret was that he wasn't Erich Berger at all, but Heini Baum, Jewish actor and cabaret performer from Berlin.

His story was surprisingly simple. He had performed in cabarets all over Europe. He had never married, and had persisted in living in Berlin, even when the Nazis came to power, because his aging parents had always lived there and would not believe that anything terrible could ever happen.

But then came the fateful night in 1940 when he had arrived at the end of his street, after the cabaret, in time to see the Gestapo taking his parents from their house. He had turned and run, pausing only to tear the Star of David from his coat. But there was nowhere to go, for his papers told the world he was a Jew. So he'd caught a train to Kiel, with the wild idea that he might be able to get a ship from there to somewhere—anywhere. He'd arrived just after one of the first of the devastating RAF raids on that city, and had stumbled through the chaos and flames searching for shelter. Lurching down into a cellar, he'd found the body of a man—Erich Berger, as Baum discovered when he examined the identity card. And one thing more. In Berger's pocket were his call-up papers, ordering him to report for military duty the following week.

What better hiding place for a Jew who was afraid to be a Jew than in the German army? Sure, at forty-four he was ten years older than Berger, but it wouldn't show. And to swap the photos of the two identity cards would be simple.

It was the paratroops he'd been inducted into. He'd been everywhere since then—Crete, Stalingrad, North Africa—a nice flashy hero in his Luftwaffe blouse and baggy paratrooper's pants, and he'd got the Iron Cross to prove it. He took another pull at the schnapps bottle and silently toasted his good fortune.

HOURS later Rommel leaned on the mantelpiece in his bedroom and stirred the fire with his boot. "So, the others would like me to talk with von Stülpnagel and Falkenhausen?"

"Yes, Herr Field Marshal," Hofer said. "But as you pointed out, secrecy would be essential."

"And opportunity," Rommel said. "Secrecy and opportunity." The clock on the mantelpiece chimed twice, and he laughed. "Two o'clock in the morning. The best time for crazy ideas."

"What are you suggesting, Herr Field Marshal?"

"Quite simple, really. What if we arranged a meeting next week with von Stülpnagel and Falkenhausen while I was actually supposed to be somewhere else? Jersey, for example?"

"The Channel Islands?" Hofer looked bewildered.

"The Führer himself suggested not two months ago that I inspect the fortifications there." He turned and smiled. "The Führer is right. As commander of the Atlantic Wall defenses, I should certainly inspect such an important part of it."

Hofer nodded. "I see that, Herr Field Marshal, but how can you be in two places at once? Meeting Falkenhausen and Stülpnagel in France and inspecting fortifications in Jersey?"

"You saw me in two places earlier this evening," Rommel said calmly, "both in the audience and onstage at the same time."

"Good Lord," Hofer whispered. "Are you serious?"

"Why not? Berger even fooled *me* when he came onstage."

"But would he be intelligent enough to carry it off? I mean, being a field marshal is rather different from being a corporal."

"He seems intelligent enough to me," Rommel told him. "A brave soldier to boot. Iron Cross First Class. And you mustn't forget that he'd have you at his shoulder every step of the way." Suddenly Rommel sounded impatient. "Where's your enthusiasm, Konrad? Let's see, it's Saturday now. How about descending on Jersey next Friday? Only for thirty-six hours or so. You can be back in France on Sunday at the latest."

"Very well, Herr Field Marshal. I'll notify the Channel Islands authorities that you'll be arriving next Friday."

"No, you won't," Rommel said. "We'll box more cleverly than that. Who's the commander-in-chief?"

"Major General Count von Schmettow. His headquarters are in Guernsey."

"And who's military commander in Jersey?"

"I'll check." Hofer took a file from his briefcase and worked his way down a list. "Yes, here we are. Colonel Heine."

"Good," said Rommel. "This is what we do. Send General von Schmettow a signal ordering him to hold a meeting in Guernsey next Saturday to consider the implications for the islands of the threatened invasion of France this summer. I want them all there—the military commander, Heine, and whoever's in charge of the navy and Luftwaffe contingents on the islands."

"Which will leave only junior officers in command."

"Exactly. I'll fly in on Friday in the Storch, or rather, you and Berger will. The first they'll know about your arrival is when you ask the tower for permission to land at the airfield."

"And what will von Schmettow think?"

"That the whole thing has been a deliberate ploy so that I can make a snap inspection of the military situation on the island."

"That's really rather clever," Hofer said.

"Yes, I think it is." Rommel started to unbutton his tunic. "Meanwhile, I'll meet with Falkenhausen and Stülpnagel at some quiet spot." He yawned. "Oh, and speak to Colonel Halder tomorrow. Tell him I'm much taken with Corporal Berger and want to borrow him for a while. I don't think he'll make any difficulties."

DOUGAL Munro slept that night on a small military bed in the corner of his office at Baker Street. It was about three o'clock in the morning when Jack Carter shook him gently awake. Munro opened his eyes instantly and sat up. "What is it?"

"Latest lists from Slapton, sir. You asked to see them. Still over a hundred bodies missing."

"And no sign of Kelso?"

"I'm afraid not. But General Montgomery has had an assurance from the navy that the German E-boats couldn't have picked up survivors. They were too far away."

"The trouble with life, Jack, is that the moment someone tells you something is impossible, someone else promptly proves that it isn't. Order a car for eight o'clock. We'll take a run down to Slapton and see for ourselves."

AT SIX o'clock on that same morning, Kelso woke up feeling very cold. His feet and hands were numb, and yet his face burned and there was sweat on his forehead.

He unzipped the flap and peered out into the gray light of dawn. He was shrouded in a dense sea fog, and somewhere in the distance he heard a foghorn.

Then he heard waves breaking on an unseen shore, and he glimpsed cliffs with concrete gun emplacements on top. All around him was white foam, rocks showing through. And then there was a voice, high and clear, and the fog rolled away to reveal a small beach. A man was running along the shore in a woolen cap, heavy reefer coat and rubber boots.

The life raft slewed broadside in the surf, lifted high and smashed against rocks, pitching Kelso into the water. He tried to stand up, but screamed as his right leg collapsed under him, and then the man was knee-deep in water, holding him. It was only at that moment that Kelso realized it was a woman. "All right, I've got you. Just hang on."

He wasn't sure what happened after that, and he came to in the shelter of some rocks. The woman was trying to drag the raft out of the water. When he attempted to sit up, she came toward him. Kelso asked as she knelt down, "Where am I, France?"

"No," she said. "Jersey."

"You're British, then?"

"I should hope so. My name's Helen de Ville. Where did your plane come down?"

"It didn't. I'm an American army officer. Colonel Hugh Kelso."

"An army officer? Where on earth have you come from?"

"England. I'm a survivor of a ship that was torpedoed in Lyme Bay." He groaned suddenly as pain knifed through him.

She opened his torn trouser leg and frowned. "That's terrible. You'll have to go to hospital."

He clutched at the front of her reefer coat. "No—no Germans."

She eased him back down. "Just lie still. I'm going to leave you for a little while. We're going to need a cart."

"Okay," he said. "But no Germans. You must promise."

She leaned over him, face set, and said, "The Jerries aren't going to have you—that's a promise. Now, wait for me."

She turned and hurried away. He lay there on that fog-shrouded shore, trying to get his bearings, and then the leg started to hurt again. Seconds later he plunged into darkness.

Chapter Three

HELEN de Ville took a shortcut from the beach, scrambling up the steep hillside through the pine trees. She was strong and wiry after four years of enemy occupation and food restrictions. She often joked that it had given her back the figure she'd enjoyed at eighteen, an unlooked-for bonus at forty-two.

She stood at the edge of the wood and looked across at the house. De Ville Place was very old, constructed of Jersey granite, weathered by the years. There were rows of French windows at the front, on either side of the entrance, and a granite wall divided the house from a courtyard at one end.

She paused, for there was an old Morris sedan parked in the courtyard, one of those requisitioned by the enemy. For two years now she'd had German naval officers billeted in the house. They came and went, of course, sometimes staying only a night or two.

As she started across the lawn, the front door opened and one of them came out. He wore a white sweater, old reefer coat and seaboots, and carried a duffel bag in one hand. The face beneath the salt-stained naval cap was good-humored and recklessly handsome. His cap had a white top, usually an affectation of German U-boat commanders, but then Lieutenant Guido Orsini was a law unto himself, an Italian attached to the German navy, trapped in the wrong place at the wrong time, when the Italian government had capitulated. Helen de Ville had long felt considerable affection for him.

"Morning, Guido."

"Helen, *cara mia*." He blew her a kiss. "I'm the last as usual."

"Where to today?"

"Normandy. Granville, to be precise. Should be fun in this fog. Can I give you a lift to St. Helier?"

"No, thanks. I'm looking for Sean."

"I saw him not ten minutes ago walking down toward his cottage. See you tomorrow. I must fly. *Ciao, cara*."

The moment she heard the Morris drive away, she crossed the courtyard, went through a field gate and ran along the track through the trees to Sean Gallagher's cottage. She could see him now, in old corduroy trousers and riding boots, the sleeves of his checked shirt rolled up above muscular arms as he split logs.

"Sean!" she called, and stumbled, almost falling.

He lowered the axe and turned toward her, pushing a lock of reddish brown hair from his eyes.

Sean Gallagher was fifty-two and, as an Irish citizen, officially neutral in this war. He had been born in Dublin, but his Jersey-born mother had died in childbirth, so the boy Sean grew up spending the long summers in Jersey with his grandparents and the rest of the year in Dublin with his father. Sean's ambition had been to be a writer. But the exigencies of life had made him a soldier, for as he finished his college degree World War I began.

He'd joined the Irish Fusiliers and by 1918 was a very old twenty-six. A major decorated for gallantry on the Somme. He continued his military career back in Ireland, and by the age of thirty he'd been made a general during the country's civil war.

Afterward, sick of killing, he'd set off to travel the world, finally settling in Jersey in 1930. Ralph de Ville had been a boyhood friend, and Sean had loved Helen, Ralph's wife, desperately and hopelessly from the first moment they had met. Sean's home, deep in the country, had been requisitioned by the Germans in 1940. Helen, with Ralph away in the British army, needed a strong right arm, so Sean had moved into the dower cottage on the estate. He still loved Helen, and still quite hopelessly.

THE old cart had seen better days, and the horse was considerably leaner than it should have been, as they negotiated the track down to the beach.

"If they find out you're helping this man," Sean said gravely, "it won't just be a prison sentence. It could mean a firing squad."

"And what about you?" Helen asked.

"I'm a neutral." He smiled mischievously, his gray eyes full of humor. "They've got to handle me with kid gloves."

Gallagher led the horse onto the fog-shrouded beach. Hugh Kelso lay face down on the sand, unconscious. Gallagher turned him over gently and examined the leg. He gave a low whistle. "He needs a surgeon, this lad. I'll get him in the cart. You gather as much driftwood as you can, and hurry."

Helen ran along the beach, and Gallagher lifted the unconscious Kelso onto the cart and draped a few cloth sacks across him.

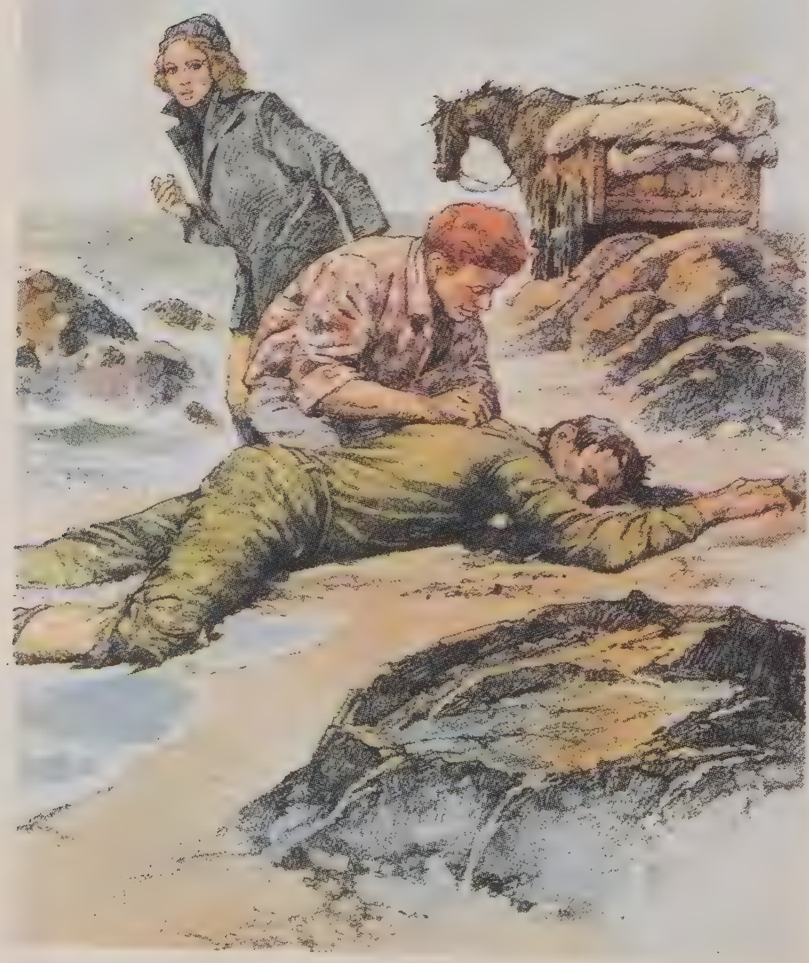
He turned as Helen came back with an armful of wood. "Cover him with that while I see to the life raft," he said.

It was still bumping around in the shallows. He waded into the water, removed the emergency kit, then took out a springblade gutting knife and slashed at the life raft's skin. As the air rushed out he rolled it up and carried it to the cart, shoving it onto the rack underneath.

"I'll stop by the paddock and we'll put the life raft down the old well. Let's get moving."

They started up the track, Helen sitting on the shaft of the cart, Sean leading the horse.

"Where do we take him?" she demanded. "There'll be no one at de Ville Place at the moment. And I gave Mrs. Vibert the day off. There's always the chamber."



During the English Civil War, Charles de Ville, the seigneur of the manor at the time, had had a secret room constructed in the roof of de Ville Place, and it became known to the family over the years as the chamber. It had saved de Ville's life during Cromwell's rule, when he was sought as a traitor.

"No, too awkward at the moment," said Sean. "He needs help, and quickly. We'll take him to my cottage first. Now, hang on while I get this life raft down the well."

He tugged it out and moved into the trees. Helen sat there, aware of her uneven breathing in the silence of the wood. Behind her, under the sacking and the driftwood, Hugh Kelso groaned and stirred.

AT SLAPTON Sands, just before noon, the tide turned and a few more bodies came in. Dougal Munro and Carter waited in the lee of a sand dune as soldiers tramped along the shoreline, occasionally venturing into the water to pull in another body.

A young American officer approached and saluted. "Thirty-three since dawn, sir. No sign of Colonel Kelso." He hesitated. "Does the brigadier wish to view the burial arrangements?"

"No, thank you," Munro said. "I think I can do without that."

The officer saluted and walked away. Munro turned to Carter. "Come on, Jack. Nothing we can do here. I've got a bad feeling about this. A very bad feeling. Let's get back to London."

"SO, BERGER, you understand what I am saying to you?" Konrad Hofer demanded.

Heini Baum stood rigidly at attention in the office at Campeaux that had been lent to the field marshal and his aide. Rommel stood at the window, looking out into the garden.

"I'm not sure, Herr Major. I think so," Baum replied.

Rommel turned. "Don't be stupid, Berger. You're an intelligent man, and a brave one." He tapped the Iron Cross with the tip of his baton. "I'm a plain man, so listen carefully. You did a wonderful impersonation of me last night. Very professional."

"Thank you."

"Now I require a second performance. On Friday you will fly to Jersey for the weekend, accompanied by Major Hofer. You think you could fool them in Jersey for that long, Berger? Would you like that?"

Baum smiled. "Actually, I think I would, sir."

Rommel said to Hofer, "There you are. Sensible and intelligent, just as I told you. Now, make the arrangements, Konrad, and let's get out of here."

THE dower cottage on the de Ville estate was built in the same kind of granite as the house. There was a large living room, with a beamed ceiling, and a dining table and six chairs in a window alcove. The kitchen was on the other side of the entrance hall. Upstairs there was a large bedroom, a storeroom and a bathroom.

Gallagher had laid Kelso out on the sofa in the living room. The American was still unconscious, and Gallagher found his wallet and opened it. Inside was his security card, some snapshots of a woman and two young girls—obviously his family—and a couple of personal letters. Kelso opened his eyes and noticed the wallet in Gallagher's hand.

"Who are you?" He grabbed at it weakly. "Give it back."

Helen came in from the kitchen and sat on the sofa. She put a hand on his forehead. "It's all right. Just be still. You're burning up with fever. Remember me, Helen de Ville?"

He nodded slowly. "The woman on the beach."

"This is a friend, General Sean Gallagher. Do you remember where you are?"

"Jersey." He smiled. "I'm not quite out of my mind yet."

"All right, then, listen to me," Sean said. "Your leg is very bad indeed. You need hospital and a good surgeon."

Kelso shook his head. "Not possible. As I told this lady earlier, no Germans. It would be better to shoot me than let them get their hands on me."

"Why?" Sean Gallagher demanded. "What's your unit?"

"Engineers—assault engineers."

Gallagher saw it all. "Is this something to do with the invasion?"

Kelso became extremely agitated. Helen soothed him, easing him down. "It's all right, I promise you."

"Is George Hamilton coming?" Gallagher now asked her.

"He was out when I telephoned. I left a message with his housekeeper that you'd cut your leg and needed a stitch or two."

"Who's Hamilton?" Kelso demanded.

"A doctor," Helen said. "And a good friend."

Kelso was shaking now from his high fever. "You must speak to your Resistance people. Tell them to notify intelligence in London that I'm here. They must try to get me out."

"But there is no resistance movement in Jersey," Helen said. "Nothing like the French Resistance, if that's what you mean."

Kelso stared at her in astonishment, and Gallagher said, "This island is approximately ten miles by five. There are about forty-five thousand civilians. The population of a good-sized market town, that's all. How long do you think a resistance movement would last here? No mountains to run to, nowhere to take refuge."

"Then what about France?" Kelso asked desperately. "Granville, St.-Malo? They're only a few hours away across the water. There must be a local unit of the French Resistance there."

There was a pause; then Helen turned to Gallagher. "Savary could speak to the right people in Granville. He has contacts."

"True."

"And Guido told me earlier they are leaving for Granville this afternoon." She glanced at her watch. "They won't have the tide until noon. You could take the van. There are those potatoes to go into St. Helier for the supply depot and the market."

"All right," Gallagher said. "But it's taking a terrible chance."

"Sean, we don't have any choice," Helen said simply.

GALLAGHER drove through the tiny, picturesque town of St. Aubin and followed the curve of the bay toward St. Helier, in the distance.

They only had the old Ford van as a special dispensation because the de Ville farmlands supplied crops for the German forces. The size of the petrol ration meant the van could be used only two or three times a week, even if Gallagher stretched the petrol by acquiring a little black-market fuel.

He checked his watch. It was just before eleven. Plenty of time to catch Savary before the S.S. *Victor Hugo* left for Granville, so he turned left onto Gloucester Street and made his way to the market.

There weren't too many people about St. Helier, because of the bad weather. Above the town-hall entrance the scarlet-and-black Nazi flag with its swastika hung limply in the damp air.

He parked outside the old Victorian Market, took two sacks of potatoes from the van and made straight for a stall on the far side. There a large, genial man was arranging turnips in neat rows under a sign that read D. CHEVALIER.

"So, it's swedes today?" Gallagher said as he arrived.

"They're good for you, General," Chevalier said.

"Oh, really? Mrs. Vibert gave me swede jam for breakfast the other day." Gallagher shuddered. "I can still taste it. Two sacks of spuds for you here."

Chevalier's eyes lit up. "I knew you wouldn't let me down, General. Let's have them in the back."

Gallagher dragged them around to the back of the stall, and Chevalier opened a cupboard and took out an old canvas bag. "Four loaves of white bread."

"Goodness," Gallagher said. "Who did you kill to get those?"

Chevalier laughed. "A quarter pound of China tea and a leg of pork. Okay?"

"Nice to do business with you," Gallagher told him. "See you next week."

His next stop was at the troop supply depot in Wesley Street, where a burly sergeant called Klinger was sitting in the glass-enclosed office eating a sandwich. He waved and came down the steps. "Herr General," he said genially.

"Hans, you certainly do well for yourself," Gallagher said in excellent German, and prodded the ample stomach.

Klinger smiled. "A man must live. You have something?"

"Two sacks of potatoes for the official list and another sack for you if you're interested."

"And in exchange?"

"Petrol."

The German nodded. "One five-gallon can."

"Two five-gallon cans," Gallagher said.

"You're so unreasonable." Klinger turned to a row of British army-issue petrol cans, picked two up and brought them to the van. "What if I turned you in?"

"Prison for me and a holiday for you," Gallagher said. "They say the Russian front's lovely at this time of the year."

"As always, a practical man." Klinger pulled the three sacks of potatoes out of the van.

Survival was what it was all about, mused Gallagher as he drove away. This was an old island, and with his Jersey blood he was fiercely proud of that. Over the centuries the island had endured many things. As he passed German naval headquarters he looked up at the Nazi flag and said softly, "And we'll still be here when you swine are long gone."

GALLAGHER parked the van at the weighbridge and walked along the Albert Pier. He looked out across the harbor. As usual, it was a hive of activity. There were craft of various kinds, from Rhine barges to large minesweepers. Several cargo vessels, among them the S.S. *Victor Hugo*, were moored against the pier.

Built in 1920, she had definitely seen better days. Her single smokestack had been punctured in several places by cannon shells from RAF Beaufighters during an attack two weeks previously. Robert Savary was the master, with a crew of ten Frenchmen. The antiaircraft defenses consisted of two machine guns and a Bofors gun, manned by seven German seamen commanded by Guido Orsini.

Gallagher walked farther along the pier toward the hut that served as a café. It was not busy. Robert Savary, a large, bearded man in a reefer coat and cloth cap, sat by himself.

"Robert, how goes it?" Gallagher demanded, and sat down.

"Unusual to see you down here, *mon général*. Which means you want something."

"Ah, you cunning old peasant." Gallagher passed an envelope under the table. "There, have you got that? Just put it in your pocket and don't ask questions. When you get to Granville, there's a café in the walled city called Sophie's. You know the good Sophie Cresson and her husband, Gerard?"

Savary was already beginning to turn pale. "Yes, of course I do." He tried to pass the envelope back under the table.

"Then you'll know that they not only shoot the Boches, but they also like to make an example of collaborators. So if I were you, I'd be sensible. Take the letter and give it to Sophie with my love. I'm sure she'll have a message for me."

"Damn you," Savary muttered, and put the letter in his pocket.

"The devil took care of that long ago. Don't worry. You've nothing to worry about. Guido Orsini's a good lad."

"The count?" Savary shrugged. "I hate aristocrats."

"No Fascist, that one, and he's probably got less time for Hitler than you have. Now, you know my telephone number at the cottage. Ring me as soon as you get back."

DR. GEORGE Hamilton was a tall, angular man whose old Harris Tweed suit looked a size too large. A distinguished London physician and pharmacologist in his day, he had retired to a cottage in Jersey. But with the outbreak of war, many people had left the island, a number of them doctors, which explained why he was now working as a general practitioner at the age of seventy.

He pushed a shock of white hair back from his forehead and stood looking down at Kelso, on the sofa. "He should be in hospital. I really need an X ray to be sure, but I'd say at least two fractures of the tibia. Possibly three."

"No hospital," Kelso said faintly.

Hamilton made a sign to Helen and Gallagher, and they followed him into the kitchen. "There is no open wound, so it might be possible simply to set the leg and plaster it."

"Can you handle that?" Helen demanded.

"I could try, but I need the right conditions. I certainly wouldn't dream of proceeding without an X ray." He hesitated. "There is one possibility. There's a little nursing home in St. Lawrence, run by Catholic Sisters of Mercy. They have X-ray facilities and a decent operating theater. Sister Maria Teresa, who's in charge, is a good friend. I could give her a ring."

"Do the Germans use it?" Helen asked.

"Now and then. Usually young women with prenatal problems, which is a polite way of saying they're in for an abortion. The nuns, as you may imagine, don't like that one little bit, but there isn't anything they can do about it."

Gallagher said, "You're taking quite a risk helping us, George."

"I'd say we all are," Hamilton told him dryly.

"It's vitally important that Colonel Kelso stay out of the hands of the enemy," Helen began.

Hamilton shook his head. "I don't want to know, Helen, and I don't want the nuns to be involved either. As far as they're concerned, our friend must be a local man who's had an accident. It would help if we had an identity card for him, just in case."

Gallagher went to a pine desk in the corner of the kitchen, pulled out the top drawer, then reached in and produced several blank identity cards, signed and stamped with the Nazi eagle.

"Where on earth did you get those?" Hamilton was astonished.

"An Irishman I know, barman in one of the town hotels, has a German girlfriend. A clerk at the Feldkommandantur. I did him a big favor last year. He gave me these in exchange. I'll fill in Kelso's details, and we'll give him a good Jersey name. How about Le Marquand?" He took out a pen and sat down. "Henry Ralph Le Marquand. Residence?" He looked up at Helen.

"Home farm, de Ville Place," she said.

"Fair enough. I'll enter his occupation as fisherman. We can say it was a boating accident. And one more thing, George."

"What's that?" Hamilton asked as he lifted the phone.

"I'm going with you. We'll take him up in the van. No arguments. Remember what Benjamin Franklin said at the signing of the American Declaration of Independence? 'We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately,' " and he smiled wryly and went out.

HAMILTON stood in the operating theater examining X-ray plates. "Three fractures," Sister Maria Teresa said. "He should be in hospital, Doctor, but I don't need to tell you that."

"Sister," Hamilton said, "if he goes down to St. Helier, our German friends will want to know how it happened. And Le Marquand was fishing illegally when the accident took place."

Gallagher cut in, "Which could earn him three months in jail."

"I see." She shook her head. "I wish I had a bed to offer, but we're quite full."

"Any Germans about?"

"Two of their girlfriends," she said calmly. "The usual thing. One of the army doctors handled that yesterday. Major Speer."

"I've worked with him on occasion," Hamilton said. "I've known worse. Anyway, Sister, if you'd care to assist me, we'll get started."

She eased him into a robe, and he went to scrub up at the sink in the corner. "A short-term anesthetic only. Chloroform on the pad will do." He moved to the operating table and looked down at Kelso. "All right?"

Kelso gritted his teeth and nodded. Hamilton said to Gallagher, "You'd better wait outside."

Gallagher turned to leave, and at that moment the door opened and a German officer walked in.

"Ah, there you are, Sister," he said in French, then smiled and changed to English. "Dr. Hamilton, what a surprise."

"Major Speer," Hamilton replied, gloved hands raised.

Speer was a tall, handsome man with a good-humored, rather fleshy face. "Anything interesting, Doctor?"

"Tibia fractures. An employee of General Gallagher here."

"I've heard of you, General. It's a pleasure to meet you." Speer moved to examine the X rays. "Not good. Not good at all. Comminuted fracture of the tibia in three places."

"I know hospitalization and traction would be the norm," Hamilton said. "But there isn't a bed available."

"Oh, I should think it perfectly acceptable to set the bones and then plaster." Speer smiled with great charm and took off his coat. "But, Herr Doctor, surgery is hardly your field. It would be a pleasure to take care of this small matter for you."

He was already taking a gown down from a peg on the wall. "If you insist," Hamilton said calmly. "There's little doubt this is more your sort of thing than mine."

From the corner Gallagher watched, fascinated.

Savary wasn't feeling too pleased with life as he walked along the cobbled streets of the walled city in Granville. The trip from Jersey in the fog had been lousy, and he was distinctly unhappy at the situation Gallagher had placed him in. He turned into a quiet square and walked slowly and reluctantly into Sophie's Bar.

Gerard Cresson sat in his wheelchair playing the piano. A small man with a white, intense face, he'd broken his back in an accident two years before the war and would never walk again.

There were a dozen or so customers scattered around the bar. Sophie sat on a high stool behind the marble counter, reading a newspaper. She was in her late thirties, dark hair piled high on her head, black eyes, face sallow like a Gypsy's, mouth painted bright red. With her husband she had controlled the local Resistance movement for three years now. They were a very successful team.

"Ah, Robert, it's been a long time. How goes it?"

"It could be worse, it could be better."

As she poured him a cognac he slipped the letter across. "What's this?" she demanded.

"Your friend Gallagher uses me as a postman now. I don't know what's in it, but he expects an answer. We sail tomorrow at noon. I'll be back." He swallowed his cognac and left.

She came around the counter and called to one of the customers, "Heh, Marcel, look after the bar for me."

Her husband stopped playing. "What was that all about?"

"Let's go in the back and find out."

She pulled his wheelchair from the piano, turned it and pushed him into the sitting room behind the bar.

Gerard Cresson sat at the table and read Gallagher's letter, then pushed it across to Sophie, his face grave.

She read it quickly. "He's in a real mess this time, our friend the General. Maybe the British will ask us to try and get this Yank out of Jersey."

"Difficult at the best of times," Gerard said. "Not possible with the state he's in. Take me to the storeroom. I must radio London."

MAJOR Speer turned from the sink, toweling his hands, and crossed to the operating table. He looked down at the unconscious Kelso.

"An excellent piece of work," George Hamilton said.

"Yes, I must say I'm rather pleased with it myself." Speer reached for his coat. "I'm sure you can handle the rest. I'm already late for dinner at the officers club. Do let me know how he progresses, Herr Doctor." He turned and went out.

Hamilton stood looking down at Kelso, who moaned a little as he came to, and said softly, "Janet, I love you."

The American accent was unmistakable. Sister Maria Teresa glanced sharply at Hamilton and then at Gallagher.

"He seems to be coming round," Hamilton said lamely.

"So it would appear," she said. "Why don't you and General Gallagher go to my office. One of the nuns will get you some coffee. Sister Bernadette and I will put the cast on for you."

"That's very kind of you, Sister."

The two men went out and along the corridor to the office at the end. Hamilton sat behind the desk, and Gallagher gave him a cigarette and sat in the window seat.

"The moment Speer came through that door will stay with me forever," the Irishman said. "You think Kelso will be all right?"

"I don't see why not. We should be able to move him in an hour or so. We'll just have to watch him closely for the next few days."

"Sister Maria Teresa knows things aren't what they seem."

"Yes, I feel bad about that," Hamilton said. "As if I've used her. She won't tell, of course. It would be contrary to every belief she holds dear."

IT WAS just after ten p.m. and Dougal Munro was still working away in his office when the door opened and Jack Carter walked in, his face grim. He placed a report on the brigadier's desk. "Brace yourself, sir. Message just in from our Resistance contact in Granville, Normandy."

Munro started to read and sat straight up. "I don't believe it."

"I warned you, sir."

"It couldn't be worse. There isn't a resistance movement in Jersey. No one to call on. I mean, this de Ville woman and the Gallagher man, how long can they manage, especially if he's ill?"

"You'll think of something, sir, you always do," Carter said.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." Munro stood up and reached for his coat. "Now you'd better phone Hayes Lodge and get me an immediate appointment with General Eisenhower."

HELEN de Ville had been waiting anxiously for the sound of the van returning, and when it drove into the courtyard, at the side of de Ville Place, she ran out. As Gallagher and Hamilton got out of the van she cried, "Is he all right?"

"Still doped up, but the leg's doing fine," Gallagher told her.

"There's no one in at the moment. They're either at sea or at the officers club, so let's get him upstairs."

Gallagher and Hamilton got Kelso out of the van and carried him through the front door, across the wide paneled hall and up the great staircase. Helen opened the door of the master bedroom and led the way in. On one side of the four-poster bed stood carved library shelving crammed from floor to ceiling with books. Her fingers found a hidden spring, and a section swung back to disclose a stairway. She led the way up, and Gallagher and Hamilton followed with some difficulty but finally made it to the chamber under the roof, where there was a bed and a single gable window.

They got Kelso onto the bed, and Helen said to him, "The only entrance is from my room, so you should be quite safe."

"All I want to do is sleep," Kelso said, his face strained.

She nodded to Gallagher and the doctor, and the two men went downstairs. Hamilton said, "I must be off. I'll look in tomorrow."

Gallagher took his hand. "George, you're quite a man."

"All in a doctor's day." Hamilton smiled. "See you tomorrow."

Gallagher went through to the kitchen. He was putting the kettle on the stove when Helen came in. "How's Kelso?" he asked.

"Fast asleep already. Now what do we do?"

"Nothing we can do until Savary gets back from Granville with some sort of message. So sit down and have a nice cup of tea."

She shook her head. "We've a choice of bramble or beet tea, and tonight I just can't face either."

"Oh, ye of little faith." Gallagher produced the packet of China tea that Chevalier had given him that morning at the market.

She started to laugh helplessly, and put her arms around his neck. "Sean Gallagher, what would I do without you?"

EISENHOWER was in full uniform, for he'd been attending a dinner party with the prime minister when he'd received Munro's message. He paced up and down the library at Hayes Lodge. "Is there no way we can put someone in?"

Munro cleared his throat. "If you mean a commando unit, I don't think so, sir. It's the most heavily defended coast in Europe."

"For heaven's sake, Munro, everything could hang on this. The whole invasion. Months of planning."

Jack Carter, standing respectfully quiet by the fire, coughed. "There is one way, General."

"What's that, Captain?" Eisenhower inquired.

"The best place to hide a tree is in a wood. It seems to me the people who are most free to come and go are the Germans themselves. I mean, new personnel must be posted there all the time."

Eisenhower turned sharply to Munro. "He's got a point. Have you got any people capable of that kind of work?"

Munro nodded. "Here and there, sir. It's a rare skill. Not just a question of speaking fluent German, but of thinking like a German too."

Eisenhower said, "I'll give you a week, Brigadier. One week and I expect you to have this matter resolved."

"My word on it, sir."

Munro walked out briskly, Carter following behind. "Radio Cresson in Granville and tell him to relay a message to Gallagher saying someone will be there by Thursday. That was a masterly suggestion of yours in there, Jack," Munro said cheerfully.

"Thank you, sir. It would take a very special man."

"There's only one man for this job. You know it and I know it. Only one man capable of playing a Nazi to the hilt. *And* he's ruthless enough to put a bullet into Kelso if worse comes to worst. Harry Martineau."

"I must remind you, sir, that Colonel Martineau was given a promise that his services wouldn't be required again. His health alone would make it impossible."

"Nonsense, Jack. Harry could never resist a challenge. Find him. And another thing. Check SOE files. See if we've got anyone with a Jersey background."

Chapter Four

THE morning after Dougal Munro's meeting with Eisenhower, Harry Martineau was walking along the seashore in Dorset, occasionally throwing stones into the incoming waves.

He was forty-four, of medium height, with good shoulders under his old paratrooper's jacket. His face was pale, with the kind of skin that never seemed to tan, his eyes so dark that it was impossible to say what their true color was. His mouth held a slight ironic smile permanently in place—the look of a man who found life more disappointing than he had hoped.

He'd been out of the hospital for three months now. He didn't get the chest pain anymore, except when he overdid things, but the insomnia was terrible. He could seldom sleep at night. Too many years on the run, danger constantly at hand.

He was no use to Munro any longer; the doctors had made that clear. He could have returned to Oxford, but that was no answer. Neither was trying to pick up the threads of the book he'd been working on in 1939. So he'd dropped out as thoroughly as a man could. The cottage above the cliffs, books to read, space to find himself in.

"SO, HE'S in Dorset, is he?" Munro said. "Doing what?"

"Not very much, from what I can make out." Carter hesitated. "But, sir, he did take two bullets in the left lung during that business in Lyons."

"No sad songs, Jack. I've other things on my mind. You've had a look at my ideas on a way of getting him into Jersey. What do you think?"

"Excellent, sir. I would have thought it all pretty foolproof, at least for a few days."

"And that's all we need. Now, what else have you got for me?"

"As I understand it from your preliminary plan, sir, what you're seeking is someone to go in with him to establish his credentials. Someone who knows the island and the people and so on?"

"That's right."

"Well, there's Sarah Anne Drayton, sir, age nineteen. Born in Jersey. Left the island just before the war to go out to Malaya, where her father was a rubber planter. A widower apparently. He sent her home to London a month before the fall of Singapore."

"Which means she hasn't been back in Jersey since when?" Munro looked at the file Carter gave him. "Nineteen thirty-eight. Six years. Good. That's a long time at that age to change, so with luck no one will recognize her. Where did you find her, Jack?"

"She was put forward for SOE consideration two years ago, mainly because she speaks fluent French with a Breton accent. Naturally, she was turned down then because of her youth."

"Where is she now?"

"Probationer nurse here in London at Cromwell Hospital."

"Excellent." Munro stood up. "Let's go and see her."

BY EIGHT o'clock on that Sunday evening the casualty department at Cromwell Hospital was working flat out. Sarah Drayton should have come off duty at six. She had now been on for fourteen hours without a break. But she kept at it, helping with casualties laid out in the corridors, trying to ignore the crump of bombs falling in the distance, the sound of fire engines.

She was a small, intense girl, dark hair pushed up under her cap, her face very determined, hazel eyes serious. After she had helped sedate a panic-stricken young girl who was bleeding badly from shrapnel wounds, the head nurse said, "All right, clear off, Drayton. You'll be falling down from fatigue. No arguments."

Sarah walked wearily along the corridor, aware that the bombing now seemed to have moved south of the city.

The night clerk was talking to two men. She said, "Actually, this is Nurse Drayton coming now."

Jack Carter said, "Miss Drayton, this is Brigadier Munro, and I'm Captain Jack Carter."

"What can I do for you?" Her voice was rather low and very pleasant. Munro was much taken with her at once.

Carter said, "Do you recall an interview you had two years ago? An intelligence matter?"

"With SOE?" She looked surprised. "I was turned down."

"Yes, well, if you could spare us some time, we'd like a word with you." He drew her over to a bench beside the wall, and he and Munro sat on either side of her. "You were born in Jersey, Miss Drayton?" Carter asked.

"That's right."

He took out his notebook and opened it. "Do you by any chance know a Mrs. Helen de Ville?"

"I do. She's my mother's cousin, although she was always Aunt Helen to me."

"And Sean Gallagher?"

"The General? I've known him since I was a child."

"When did you last see him or your aunt?" Munro asked.

"Nineteen thirty-eight. When my mother died, my father took a job in Malaya, and I went out to join him." She frowned at Munro for a moment. "What's this about?"

"It's quite simple really," Dougal Munro said. "I'd like to offer you a job with SOE. I'd like you to go to Jersey for me."

She stared at him in astonishment.

"STRANGE chap, Harry Martineau," Munro said. "I've never known anybody quite like him."

"From what you tell me, neither have I," Sarah said.

The car taking them down to the English coast the next day was a huge Austin, with a glass partition separating them from the driver. Munro and Carter were in the back, side by side, and Sarah Drayton was sitting on the jump seat opposite. She was wearing a tweed suit, black brogues and a cream blouse with a black string tie at the neck. She looked very attractive. She also looked extremely young.

"It was his birthday the week before last," Carter told her.

She was immediately interested. "How old was he?"

"Forty-four."

"What they call a child of the century," Munro told her. "Born on the seventh of April, 1900."

"Aries," she said.

Munro smiled. "That's right. Before our so-called enlightened times, astrology was a science. Did you know that? The ancient Egyptians always chose their generals from Leos, for example."

"I'm a Leo," she said. "July twenty-seventh."

"Then you *are* in for a complicated life. Something of a hobby of mine. Take Harry, for instance. Very gifted. Professor at Oxford at thirty-eight. Then look at what he became in middle life."

"How do you explain that?" she demanded.

"Well, Aries is a warrior sign, but very commonly those born around the same time as Harry are one thing on the surface, something else underneath. Rising sign in Gemini, you see, and Gemini is the sign of the twins. On one level you're Harry Martineau, scholar, philosopher, full of sweet reason, but on the dark side . . ." He shrugged. "Cold and ruthless."

Carter said, "Just in case you're getting a rather bad impression of Harry Martineau, Sarah, two things. Although his mother was born in the States, she was of German parentage, and Harry spent a lot of time with his grandparents in Dresden as he grew up. His grandfather, a professor of surgery, was an active Socialist. He died in a fall from the balcony of his apartment. A nasty accident."

"Aided by two Gestapo thugs," Munro put in.

"And then there was a Jewish girl named Rosa Bernstein. Harry met Rosa and fell in love when she did a year at Oxford in 1933. Both his parents were dead. His father had left him reasonably well off, and as an only child he had no close relatives."

"But he and Rosa never married?"

"No. She was active in the underground. Went backward and forward from England to Germany as a courier. In May 1938 she was apprehended and taken to Gestapo headquarters. She was interrogated with extreme brutality, and executed."

There was a long silence. Sarah seemed abstracted, staring out the window into the distance. "So Harry Martineau doesn't particularly care for Germans?" she said finally.

"He doesn't like Nazis. There's a difference."

She stared out the window again, her mind filled with this man she had never met.

"One thing we didn't ask," Carter said. "I hope you don't mind my being personal, but is there anyone in your life at the moment? Anyone who would miss you?"

"A man? Good heavens, no! I never work less than a twelve-hour shift at the Cromwell. That leaves just about enough time to have a bath and a meal before falling into bed." She shook her head. "No one to miss me at all. I'm all yours, gentlemen."

HARRY Martineau awoke that morning with a dull headache. Only one answer to that. He pulled on an old tracksuit, grabbed a towel and ran down to the sea.

He stripped and ran out through the shallows, plunging into the waves. The sky was slate gray, and there was rain on the wind. Yet quite suddenly he experienced one of those special moments. Sea and sky seemed to become one. Nothing mattered. Not the past or the future. Only this present moment. As he turned on his back in the water, it started to rain.

A voice called, "Enjoying yourself, Harry?"

Martineau turned toward the shore and saw Munro standing there in an old tweed coat and battered hat, holding an umbrella over his head. "Oh, no!" he said. "Not you, Dougal?"

"As ever was, Harry. Come on up to the cottage. There's someone I'd like you to meet."

Munro turned and walked back across the beach. Martineau floated for a while, thinking about it. Dougal Munro wasn't just paying a social call, that was for sure, not all the way from London. Excitement surged through him, and he waded out of the water. He toweled himself briskly, pulled on the old tracksuit and ran across the beach and up the cliff path. When he reached the cottage, Jack Carter was standing on the porch.

"What, you too, Jack?" Martineau smiled and took the other man's hand. "Does the old devil want me to go back to work?"

"Something like that." Carter hesitated, then said, "Personally, Harry, I think you've done enough."

"No such word in my vocabulary, Jack." Martineau brushed past him and went inside.

Munro was sitting by the fire reading a notepad he'd found on the table. "Still writing bad poetry?"

"Always did." Martineau took the pad from him, tore off the top sheet, crumpled it up and tossed it into the fireplace. It was then that he became aware of Sarah Drayton standing in the kitchen doorway.

"I'm making tea. I hope that's all right, Colonel Martineau. I'm Sarah Drayton." She didn't hold out her hand, for it would have trembled too much. Her stomach was hollow with excitement, her throat dry. *Coup de foudre*, the French called it. The thunderclap. The best kind of love of all. Instant and irrevocable.

At first he responded, his face illuminated by a smile. Then the smile faded and he turned to Munro with anger in his voice. "Good Lord, Dougal. So now you're using schoolgirls?"

Hugh Kelso's adventures did not take long in the telling. When Munro had finished with that, he carried on. "Last month we knocked off a man called Braun, in Paris. Jack has the details. I think you'll find it interesting."

"What was he, Gestapo?" Martineau asked.

"No, SD." Carter turned to Sarah Drayton, sitting on the other side of the fire. "That's the secret intelligence department of the SS, responsible only to Himmler himself."

"Go on about Braun," Martineau said.

"Well, according to his papers, he was a member of Himmler's personal staff." He passed a piece of paper to Martineau. "It seems Braun was empowered to make his own investigations wherever he pleased. Read that letter."

Martineau looked at it. The heading was embossed in black.

> DER REICHSFÜHRER—SS Berlin, 9 November 1943
> SS—Sturmbannführer Erwin Braun acts under my personal orders on business of the utmost importance to the Reich. All personnel, military and civil, must assist him in any way he sees fit.
> H. Himmler

A remarkable document. Even more astonishing was that it was countersigned across the bottom by Adolf Hitler himself.

"He obviously had a certain amount of influence," Martineau said dryly, handing it back to Carter.

"Well, he's dead now, but our Paris people got some useful information out of him."

"I bet they did," Martineau said, and lit a cigarette.

"Himmler has a dozen or so of these special envoys floating around Europe. All highly secret. Nobody knows who they are. I've got the forgery department preparing a complete set of papers for you, including an SD identity card and a copy of that letter. Name of Max Vogel. We thought we'd give you a little rank, so it's Standartenführer." Munro turned to Sarah. "Colonel to you."

"I get the picture," Martineau said. "I arrive in Jersey and frighten the hell out of everyone."

"You must admit, you do a very good Nazi, Harry."

"And Sarah?" Martineau inquired. "Where does she fit in?"

"You need someone with you to establish your credentials with Mrs. de Ville and this chap Gallagher. Sarah is related to one and knows the other. Another thing, she was last in Jersey six years ago, age thirteen. Helen de Ville and Gallagher might still recognize her, but she'll pass as a stranger among other people, especially when we've finished with her."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, there's a fair trade in ladies of the night between France and Jersey."

"You're not suggesting she play a French tart?"

"Most senior German officers in France have French girlfriends. Why should you be any different? Sarah speaks excellent French with a Breton accent because that's what her grandmother was. By the time our people at Berkley Hall have finished with her—changed her hair color, got her into the right clothes . . ."

"And when are we supposed to go in?"

"Day after tomorrow. An air drop near Granville, in Normandy. Afterward you will use your authority to cross to Jersey on one of the night boats. Once over there, you've got till Sunday at the outside to get Hugh Kelso off the island."

"And what if it's impossible to get him out?"

"Up to you. I'll back whatever you decide to do."

"I see. I play executioner for you again?" Martineau turned on Sarah. "What do you think about all this?"

He was angry, his eyes very dark. Yet Sarah remained calm. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "It sounds rather exciting."

He opened his mouth as if to speak, then changed his mind, turned and poured himself a Scotch instead. He raised his glass and toasted them all. "Here we go, then. Berkley Hall next stop."

THE firing range at Berkley Hall was in the basement of the vast country manor house now used as a wartime training site. The armorer was an Irish Guards staff sergeant named Kelly, long past retirement and back in harness only because of the war. The place was brightly lit at the target end, where cutout replicas of charging Germans stood against sandbags. Kelly and Sarah Drayton were the only people on the firing line. They'd given her battle dress to wear—slacks and blouse of blue serge. She'd tucked her hair up inside the peaked cap, leaving her neck bare. It somehow made her look very vulnerable.

Kelly had various weapons laid out on the table. "Have you ever fired a handgun before, miss?"

"Yes," she said. "In Malaya. My father was a rubber planter. He used to be away a great deal, so he made sure I knew how to use a revolver."

"That's good. Obviously in more normal circumstances you'd be given a thorough grounding in weaponry as part of your course, but in your case there just isn't time. What I'll do is familiarize you with some basic weapons you're likely to come across. Then you can fire a few rounds."

"Fair enough," she said.

He went through the submachine guns with her, then the handguns. When she tried a Smith & Wesson, arm extended, she only managed to nick the target once out of six shots.

"I'm afraid you'd be dead, miss."

As he reloaded she said, "Is Colonel Martineau any good?"

"You could say that, miss. I don't think I've ever known anyone better. Now try this way." He crouched, feet apart, holding the gun two-handed. "See what I mean?"

"I think so." She copied him, and this time she did better, hitting the target once in the shoulder.

"Terrific," Kelly said.

"Not if you consider she was probably aiming for the heart."

Martineau had come in quietly behind them. He wore a dark turtlenecked sweater and black corduroy pants. "As I'm going to have to look after this infant, do you mind if I take a hand?"

"Be my guest, sir."

Martineau picked up a pistol from the table. To Sarah he said, "Walther PPK, semiautomatic. Seven-round magazine goes in the butt, like so. Pull the slider back and you're in business. It's not too large, but it's a manstopper. Now come down the range."

They moved within ten yards of the targets.

"You should never be farther away than this. Simply throw up your arm and point. Keep both eyes open and fire very fast."

She hit the target six times. "Oh, my word," she said, very excited. "That wasn't bad, was it?"

As they walked back to the firing line he said, "Yes, but could you do it for real?"

"I'll only know when the time comes, won't I? Anyway, what about you? The brigadier told me you were ruthless. Are you?"

There was another Walther on the table with a round cylinder screwed onto the end of the barrel. "This is what's called a Carswell silencer," Martineau told her, ignoring her question. "Specially designed for use by SOE agents."

His arm swung up. He didn't appear to take aim. He fired twice, shooting out the heart of the target. He laid the gun down and turned. "Dougal wants us in the library in half an hour. I'll see you then." He walked out.

There was an awkward silence. Sarah said to Kelly, "He seemed angry."

"The colonel gets like that, miss. I don't think he likes what he sees in himself sometimes. Last November he killed the head of the Gestapo in Lyons. Colonel Martineau took two bullets in his left lung before he got away. He's been different since then."

"In what way?"

"I don't know, miss." Kelly frowned. "Here, don't you go getting silly ideas about him. I know what you young girls can be like. Just remember he's got twenty-five years on you."

"You mean he's too old?" Sarah said. "Isn't that like saying you can't love someone because they're Catholic or Jewish or American or something? What's the difference?"

"Too clever for me, that kind of talk." Kelly opened a drawer and took out a cloth bundle, which he unwrapped. "A little present for you, miss." It was a small, black automatic pistol, very light. "Belgian. Only twenty-five caliber, but it'll do the trick when you need it." He looked awkward.

She reached up and kissed him on the cheek. "I think you're wonderful."

"You can't do that, miss, being an officer. Against regulations."

"But I'm not an officer, Sergeant."

"I think you are, miss. Probably one of the things the brigadier wants to tell you. I'd go to the library now if I were you."

MUNRO, Carter and Martineau were already in the library at Berkley Hall having afternoon tea when Sarah went in.

"Ah, there you are," Munro said. "Do join us."

As Carter poured her tea Sarah said, "Sergeant Kelly said something about my being an officer now. What did he mean?"

"Yes, well, we do prefer our women operatives to hold some sort of commissioned rank. In theory it's supposed to help you if you fall into enemy hands," Munro told her. "Anyway, you are now a flight officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Now let's look at the map."

They all went to a table where several large-scale maps were spread out, making a patchwork that included the south of England, the Channel Islands, Normandy and Brittany.

"The flight will take no more than an hour and a half," Munro explained. He indicated a spot on the coast of Normandy. "You'll land not far from Granville, and the local Resistance people will be on hand to take care of you."

"Then what?" Sarah asked.

"That evening you'll leave Granville by ship for Jersey. Most German convoys go by night." He turned to Martineau. "Naturally, the question of passage is a matter for you in your role as Standartenführer Max Vogel. But I doubt whether anyone is likely to do anything other than run round in circles when they see your credentials." Martineau nodded.

"As regards your dealings with Mrs. de Ville and General Gallagher. Well, you have Sarah to vouch for you."

Munro picked up the phone at his side. "Send Mrs. Moon in now." He put the phone down and said to Sarah, "We're very lucky to have Mrs. Moon. We borrow her from Denham film studios. There's nothing she doesn't know about makeup, dress and so on."

Hilda Moon arrived moments later. She was a large woman with dyed red hair who spoke with a cockney accent and wore too much lipstick.

"Yes." She nodded, walking around Sarah. "Very nice. Of course, I'll have to do something with the hair."

"Do you think so?" Sarah asked in alarm.

"Girls who make a living from pleasing men, the way you're supposed to in this part, dear, have to make the best of what they've got. You trust me. I know what's best for you." She took Sarah by the arm and led her out.

As the door closed, Martineau said, "We probably won't even recognize her when we see her again."

"No." Munro smiled. "But that's the general idea."

IT WAS early that same evening when the phone rang in Sean Gallagher's cottage. He was in the kitchen working through farm accounts and answered it instantly. A familiar voice said, "Savary here. The matter of the package we discussed."

"Yes."

"My contact in Granville was in touch with their head office. It seems someone will be with you by Thursday."

"You're certain of that?"

"Absolutely."

The phone went dead. Gallagher sat thinking for a moment, then put on his old corduroy jacket and went up to de Ville Place.

AS MRS. Moon worked on Sarah she talked incessantly. "I've been everywhere, all the studios. I do all Miss Margaret Lockwood's makeup and Mr. James Mason. Now, he *is* a gentleman."

When Sarah came out from under the dryer, she couldn't believe what she saw. Her dark hair was a golden blond and marcelled tight against her face. Then Mrs. Moon started with the makeup. "Plenty of rouge, dear. A little too much, if you know what I mean, and lots of lipstick. Now, what do you think?"

Sarah sat looking into the mirror. It was the face of a stranger.

"We'll try one of the dresses. Of course, the underwear and every individual item will be of French origin, but you only need the dress at the moment, just for the effect."

It was black satin, very tight and rather short. She helped Sarah into it and zipped it at the back.

Sarah pulled on a pair of high-heeled shoes and looked at herself in the mirror. She giggled. "I look the most awful tart."

"Well, that's the idea, love. Now, go and see the brigadier."

Munro and Carter were still sitting in the library, talking in low tones, when she went in.

It was Carter who looked up first. "Good Lord!" he said.

Munro was far more positive. "I like it. Very much. Yes, they'll go for you in the German officers club in St. Helier."

The door opened and Martineau entered. She turned to face him, hands on hips in a deliberate challenge. "Well?"

"Well, what?" he replied.

She sighed in exasperation. "You can be a most infuriating man, Colonel Martineau. Is there a village near here with a pub?"

"Yes."

"Will you take me for a drink?"

"Like that?"

"You mean I don't look nice enough?"

"Actually, you transcend all Mrs. Moon's efforts. You couldn't be a tart if you tried, brat. I'll see you in the hall in fifteen minutes." He turned and went out.

THE bar was crowded, but they managed to find a couple of seats in the corner by the fire and ordered drinks. "Well, what do you think of it so far?" he asked.

"It makes a change from the wards at the Cromwell."

"In other circumstances you'd be trained for about six weeks," he said. "The Scottish Highlands to toughen you up. Courses in unarmed combat and so on."

"That sounds very grueling."

"Anybody can be taught to do it," he said. "It's brains that are important in this game. Look, let's have some facts. Let's stop playing games in black satin dresses with our hair bleached. You know what techniques the Gestapo employ in breaking down any woman agent who falls into their hands?" He paused, then added, "I used to have a girlfriend in Berlin. She was Jewish."

"I know. Carter told me about her."

"How they tortured, then murdered her in the Gestapo cellars?" Martineau shook his head. "He doesn't know everything. He doesn't know that the head of the Gestapo in Lyons, who I killed last November, was the man responsible for Rosa's death in Berlin in 1938."

"I see now," she said softly. "Sergeant Kelly said you were different, and he was right. You hated that Gestapo chief for years, and when you finally took revenge, you found it meant nothing."

He laughed coldly. "All I've learned for certain is that going over there and taking on the Gestapo isn't like one of those movies they make in Hollywood. There are forty million people in France. You know how many we estimate are active members of the Resistance?"

"No."

"Two thousand, Sarah. Two lousy thousand." He was disgusted. "I don't know why we bother."

"Then why do you? Not just for Rosa or your grandfather." He turned briefly, and she said, "Oh, yes, I know about him too."

There was a silence. "It's something I've never talked about," Martineau began. "I was due to go to Harvard in 1917. Then America joined the war. I joined up on sheer impulse and ended in the trenches in Flanders." He shook his head. "Whatever you mean by hell on earth, that was the trenches."

"It must have been terrible," she said.

"And yet I relished it. Can you understand that? I lived more, felt more, in one day than in a year of ordinary living. Life became real, exciting. I couldn't get enough."

"Like a drug?"

"Exactly. That was what I ran away from afterward, back to Harvard and Oxford and the safe world of classrooms and books."

"And now the war has come round again."

"Yes, and Dougal Munro has yanked me back out into the real world. . . . The rest, as they say in the movies, you know."

Chapter Five

THE following day, just after noon at Fermanville, on the Cherbourg peninsula, Karl Hagan, the duty sergeant at the central strongpoint of the 15th Coast Artillery battery, was idly leaning on a parapet in the pale afternoon sunshine when he observed a black Mercedes coming up the track. No escort, so it wouldn't be anyone important—and then he noticed the pennant fluttering on the hood. He was inside the operations room in a flash, where Captain Reimann, the battery commander, sprawled at his desk reading a book.

"Someone coming, sir. Looks like top brass to me. Surprise inspection perhaps."

"Right. Klaxon alarm. Get the men to fall in, just in case."

Reimann buttoned his tunic and adjusted his cap to a satisfactory angle. As he went out on the redoubt, the Mercedes pulled in below. The driver got out, followed by an army major with staff stripes on his trousers. The next man out was Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, in leather trench coat, with desert goggles pulled up above the peak of his cap.

Reimann had never been so shocked in his life. As he hurried down the steps he heard the battery personnel running out into the courtyard below to take up their positions.

Reimann moved toward Rommel and saluted. "Herr Field Marshal. You do us a great honor."

Rommel tapped the end of his field marshal's baton against the peak of his cap. "Your name?"

"Reimann, Herr Field Marshal."

"Major Hofer, my aide." Rommel indicated the man at his side.

Hofer said, "The field marshal will inspect everything, including the subsidiary strongpoints. Please lead the way."

For the next hour Rommel tramped the cliff top from one strongpoint to another. Radio rooms, men's quarters, ammunition stores—nothing escaped his attention.

"Excellent, Reimann," he told the young artillery officer. "First-rate performance. I'll endorse your field-unit report personally."

Reimann almost fainted with pleasure. He called the redoubt's honor guard to attention. Rommel tapped the baton against his cap again and got into the Mercedes. Hofer joined him on the other side, and as they were driven away Hofer said, "I think you carried that off very well, Berger."

"Then, Herr Major," Heini Baum said, "I get the booking?"

"One more test, I think. Dinner at some officers mess perhaps. Then you'll be ready for Jersey."

WHEN Sarah Drayton and Harry Martineau went into the library at Berkley Hall on the evening of their departure, Jack Carter was sitting with the maps spread before him.

"Ah, there you are," he said. "Brigadier Munro has gone up to London to report to General Eisenhower, but he'll be back tonight to see you off. Here are your papers, Sarah. Ration cards.

French identity card with photo." He handed her a slip of paper. "There are your personal details. Your name is Anne-Marie Latour. We've kept to your own age and birth date. Born in Brittany, naturally, to explain your accent. We've made your place of birth Paimpol, on the coast. I believe you know it well?"

"Yes, my grandmother lived there."

"One more thing. Your relationship with Standartenführer Vogel must at all times seem convincing. You do appreciate what that could entail?"

"Sharing a room?" She smiled calmly. "No problem, Captain."

"All right. Then read this, both of you. Regulations, Sarah."

It was a typical SOE operations order in no-nonsense language, laying out the task ahead. There was a code name for the operation: Jerseyman. At the end of the order it said "now destroy."

Martineau struck a match and touched it to the paper, dropping it into the ashtray. "That's it, then," he said. "I'll go and do my packing. See you two later."

On the bed in his room the wardrobe people had laid out a three-piece suit in gray tweed, shoes, some white shirts, two black ties. There was also a military overcoat in soft black leather.

The gray-green SS uniform hung behind the door. He checked it carefully for the appropriate decorations. Then he tried it on. Everything fitted to perfection. He picked up the cap, examined the silver death's-head badge, then put it on his head at a slight angle. From behind, Sarah said, "I get the feeling you like uniforms."

"I like getting it right," he said. "It's important, Sarah. You don't get second chances."

There was a kind of distress on her face, and she moved close and gripped his arm. "I'm not sure if it's you anymore, Harry."

"It isn't, not in this uniform. It's Standartenführer Max Vogel of the SD. Feared by his own side as much as by the French. You'll see. This isn't a game any longer."

She shivered. "I know, Harry, I know."

HORNLEY Field had been an aero club before the war. It was now used for clandestine flights to the Continent, mainly Lysanders and the occasional Liberator. The commanding officer was a Squadron Leader Barnes, an ex–fighter pilot.

It was two thirty in the morning, but warm enough in a hut near the grass runway, where a stove was roaring away. "Can I offer you some more coffee, Flight Officer?" Barnes asked Sarah.

She turned and smiled. "No, thanks."

Martineau stood by the stove, hands in the pockets of his leather trench coat. He wore the tweed suit and a dark slouch hat.

"You're going to have to get moving, I'm afraid," Barnes said. "Just the right conditions at the other end if you go now. Too light if you wait."

"I can't imagine what's happened to the brigadier," Carter said.

"It doesn't matter." Martineau turned to Sarah. "Ready to go?"

She nodded and carefully pulled on her leather gloves. She was wearing a black coat nipped in at the waist, with wide shoulders, all very fashionable.

Martineau picked up their two suitcases and they went out and crossed to the Lysander where the pilot, Flight Lieutenant Green, waited. "Any problems?" Martineau asked.

"Coastal fog, but only in patches." Green glanced at his watch. "We'll be there by four thirty at the outside."

Sarah went into the plane first and strapped herself in. Martineau passed up the suitcases, then shook hands with Carter. "See you soon, Jack."

"You've got the call sign to alert us," Carter said. "All Cresson has to do is send that. We'll have a Lysander out to the same field at ten p.m. on the same day to pick you up."

Martineau climbed in next to Sarah and fastened his seat belt. He didn't look at her, but he took her hand as Green climbed into the pilot's seat. The sound of the engines shattered the night. They taxied to the end of the runway. As they started to roll between the twin lines of lights, gradually increasing speed, an Austin turned in through the main gate, hesitated for the sentry's inspection, then bumped across the grass toward the hut. As Dougal Munro got out, the Lysander lifted over the trees at the far end of the field and was swallowed by darkness.

"Blast!" he said. "Held up at Baker Street, Jack. Something came up. Thought I'd just make it."

"They couldn't wait, sir," Barnes told him. "Might have made things difficult at the other end."

"Of course," Munro said.

Barnes walked away and Munro said, "The ball's in Harry Martineau's court now. All up to him."

"And Sarah Drayton, sir," said Carter.

"Yes. I liked that young woman." Aware suddenly that he had spoken in the past tense, Munro shivered, as if at an omen.

THE flight was completely uneventful, and less than two hours later the Lysander crossed over the Cherbourg peninsula. Green turned the plane slightly toward the south and spoke over the intercom. "Fifteen minutes, so be ready."

"Any chance of running into a night fighter?" Martineau asked.

"Unlikely. There's a maximum-effort strike by Bomber Command on various towns in the Ruhr tonight. Every night fighter in France will have scrambled to go and protect the Fatherland."

"Look!" Sarah cut in. "I can see lights."

"That's it," Green told them. "I've landed here twice before. In and out very fast. You know the drill, Colonel."

And then they were drifting down over the trees into the meadow. As they rolled to a halt Sophie Cresson ran forward, waving. She held a Sten gun in one hand. Martineau got the door open, threw out the suitcases and jumped down. He turned to help Sarah, while behind her Green slammed the door shut, locking the handle. The engine note deepened to a full-throated roar as the Lysander raced across the meadow and took off.

Sophie Cresson gathered up the three lamps she had used as landing lights and said, "Come on, let's get out of here. Bring your suitcases." They followed her to an old Renault van and she opened the rear door. In the back were several barrels of dead chickens and a few pheasant.

"There's just enough room for both of you to sit behind the two barrels. Don't worry, I know every flic in the district. If they stop me, all they'll do is take a chicken and go home."

"Some things never change," Sarah said.

"Heh, a Breton girl?" Sophie turned her flashlight on Sarah's face and grunted. "My God, now they send little girls." She shrugged. "In you get and let's be out of here."

Sarah crouched behind the barrels, her knees touching Martineau's as Sophie drove away. So, this is it, she thought, the real thing. No more games now. She opened her handbag and felt for the little pistol Kelly had given her. Would she be able to use it if necessary? Only time would tell. She leaned back against the side of the van feeling wonderfully, marvelously alive.

It was noon before Sarah awoke, yawning and stretching her arms. The small bedroom under the roof was plainly furnished but comfortable. She threw back the sheets and crossed to the window. The view of Granville harbor was really quite special. Behind her the door opened and Sophie came in with a bowl of coffee on a tray.

"So, you're up."

"It's good to be back." Sarah took the bowl from her and sat on the window seat.

"You've been here before?" Sophie asked.

"Many times. My mother was half Jersey, half Breton. My grandmother was born in Paimpol. I used to come over to Granville from Jersey when I was a little girl. There was a fisherman's café on the quay that had the finest hot rolls in the world."

"Not anymore," Sophie said. "The war has changed everything. Look down there."

The harbor was crammed with Rhine barges and a number of German naval craft. "They're definitely sailing for the islands tonight?" Sarah asked.

"Oh, yes. Some for Jersey, the rest on to Guernsey. Now, get dressed and come downstairs and we'll have some lunch."

At Gavray, in what had once been the country home of the count of that name, Heini Baum sat at one end of the table in the officers mess of the 41st Panzer Grenadiers and smilingly acknowledged the cheers as the officers toasted him. When they were finished, the young colonel of the regiment said, "If you could manage a few words, Herr Field Marshal? It would mean so much to my officers."

There was a worried look in Hofer's eyes when Baum glanced at him, but he disregarded it and stood up, straightening his tunic. "Gentlemen, the Führer has given us a simple task. To keep the enemy off our beaches. Yes, I say *our* beaches. Europe, one and indivisible, is our goal. There is no possibility of losing. The destiny of the Führer is God-given." He raised his glass. "So, gentlemen, to our beloved Führer, Adolf Hitler."

"Adolf Hitler!" they chorused.

Baum tossed his glass into the fire, and with a stirring of excitement they all did the same. Then they applauded again, forming two lines as he walked out, followed by Hofer.

"Rather heavy on the glasses, I should have thought," Hofer said as they drove back to Cressy, where Rommel had established temporary headquarters at the old castle.

"You didn't approve?" Baum said.

"I didn't say that. Actually, the speech was rather good. It was exactly what they wanted to hear."

Crazy, Baum thought. Am I the only sane man left alive?

They drew into the courtyard of the castle and went up the steps fast to the suite on the second floor.

Rommel had locked himself in his study and only came out when he heard Hofer's knock. "How did it go?"

"Perfect," Hofer said. "He passed with flying colors. You should have heard the speech you made."

"Excellent." Rommel nodded. "Everything progresses in the Channel Islands? You spoke to von Schmettow in Guernsey?"

"Personally, Herr Field Marshal."

"Good," Rommel said. "Which still leaves you and Berger flying in with RAF superiority in the area." He turned to Baum. "What do you think about that, Berger?"

"I think it could be interesting if the Herr Major and I went down in flames into the sea. The Desert Fox is dead." He shrugged. "That could lead to some strange possibilities, you must admit, Herr Field Marshal."

GERARD Cresson sat in his wheelchair in the sitting room and refilled the glasses with red wine. "No, I hate to dispel your illusions," he said to Sarah, "but out on Jersey, just as in France and every other occupied country in Europe, the real enemy is the informer. Without them the Gestapo couldn't operate."

"But I was told that there's no Gestapo in Jersey," Sarah said.

"Officially they have a Geheime Feldpolizei setup there. That's the Secret Field Police, and they're controlled by the Abwehr. Military intelligence. The whole thing is part of the ruling-by-kindness policy, a cosmetic exercise aimed at fooling the people. The implication is, Because you're British, we won't sic the Gestapo on to you."

"Which is rubbish," Sophie put in, "because several of the men working for the GFP in Jersey are Gestapo operatives."

"Mind you," Gerard added, "on Jersey it's a Mickey Mouse operation compared to Lyons or Paris, but watch out for a Captain Muller—he's in command—and his chief aide, Inspector Kleist."

"Are they SS?" Martineau asked.

"I don't know. Probably not. They're probably on loan from the police in some big city. Full of themselves, like all flics."

"So, how do you rate our chances of bringing Kelso over from Jersey?" Martineau asked.

"It will be very difficult indeed. They are very tight on civilian traffic. It would be impossible in a small boat at the moment."

"And if he can't walk . . ." Sophie shrugged expressively.

"We'll think of something," said Martineau.

"Like a bullet in the head maybe?" Cresson suggested.

Martineau shook his head. "He's entitled to a chance. If there's any way I can pull him out, I will. Now, what's the procedure for booking a passage to the island tonight?"

"There's an officer in the green hut on the quay. He issues the passes. There'll be no difficulty in your case."

"Good," Martineau said. "That seems to be about it, then."

Sophie picked up her glass. "I'm not going to wish you luck. I'm just going to tell you something."

"What's that?" Martineau inquired.

She put an arm around Sarah's shoulders. "You bring this kid back in one piece, because if you don't and you show your face here again, I'll put a bullet in you myself."

She smiled genially and toasted him.

DARKNESS was already falling and Granville harbor was a scene of frenzied activity as the freight convoy got ready to leave. Chief Petty Officer Hans Richter of the E-boat escort checked the Bofors gun in the stern of his boat, then paused to watch dockers working on the *Victor Hugo*, which was moored next to them. Now that her holds were crammed full, they were dumping sacks of coal and bales of hay on her decks.

Richter could see the master of the *Hugo*, Savary, on the bridge, talking to the officer in command of the gun crew, the Italian lieutenant. Orsini was as flamboyant as usual, with a red scarf at his neck. As Richter watched, Orsini went down the gangway to the quay and walked toward the port officer's hut. Richter then turned back to the gun, and a voice called, "Petty Officer!"

Richter looked over the rail. Standing a few feet away was an SS officer, a black leather trench coat over his uniform, the silver death's-head on his cap gleaming dully in the evening light. When Richter saw the oak-leaf collar patches of a full colonel, his heart sank. He clicked his heels together quickly. "Standartenführer. What can I do for you?"

The young woman standing at the colonel's shoulder was pretty in her little black beret and belted raincoat, her hair very fair. Too young for an SS bore like this, Richter thought.

"Your commanding officer is Kapitanleutnant Dietrich, I understand?" Martineau said. "Is he on board?"

"No, Standartenführer. He is in the port officer's hut."

"Good. I'll have a word with him." Martineau gestured to the two suitcases. "See that these go on board. We'll be traveling with you to Jersey."

Richter watched them walk away, then nodded to a young seaman who'd been listening with interest. "You heard the man. Get those cases."

"He was SD," the sailor said. "Did you notice?"

"Yes," Richter said. "As it happens, I did. Now, get on with it."

ERICH Dietrich, at only thirty years of age, was never happier than when he was at sea and in command. Just now, leaning over the chart table with the port officer, Lieutenant Schroeder, and Guido Orsini, he was in the best of humors.

Shroeder said, "Intelligence expects big raids on the Ruhr again tonight, so things should be clear for us as regards the RAF."

"If you believe that, you'll believe anything," Orsini said.

"You're a pessimist, Guido," Erich Dietrich told him. "Expect good things and they'll always fall into your lap."

Just then the door opened behind him. Schroeder's face dropped and Guido stopped smiling. Dietrich turned and found Martineau standing there, Sarah at his shoulder.

"Kapitanleutnant Dietrich? My name is Vogel." Martineau produced his SD identity card and passed it across; then he took Himmler's letter from its envelope. "If you would be kind enough to read this also."

Dietrich read the letter, then handed the documents back. "Your credentials are without doubt the most remarkable I've ever seen, Standartenführer," Dietrich said. "How can we serve you?"

"I need passage for myself and Mademoiselle Latour to Jersey. As you are convoy commander, I shall naturally travel with you. I've already told your petty officer to take our cases on board."

"Happy to oblige, Standartenführer," Dietrich said smoothly. "There is one problem, however. Naval regulations forbid the carrying of civilians on a fighting ship at sea. I can accommodate you, but not, alas, this charming young lady."

It was difficult to argue with him because he was right. Martineau tried to handle it as a man like Vogel would have done—arrogant, demanding. "What would you suggest?"

"One of the other convoy ships perhaps. Lieutenant Orsini here is in command of the gun crew on the S.S. *Victor Hugo*. You could go with him."

But Vogel would not have allowed himself to lose face completely. "No," he said calmly. "It is good that I should see something of your work, Kapitanleutnant. I shall travel with you. Mademoiselle Latour can proceed on the *Victor Hugo* if Lieutenant Orsini has no objections."

"Certainly not," said Guido, who had hardly been able to take his eyes off her. "A distinct pleasure."

"Unfortunately, Mademoiselle Latour speaks no German." Martineau turned to her and spoke in French. "We must separate for the journey across, my dear. A matter of regulations. I'll keep your luggage with me, so don't worry about that. This young officer will take care of you."

"Guido Orsini, at your service, signorina," he said gallantly, and saluted. "Come with me and I'll see you safely on board."

She turned to Martineau. "I'll see you later, then, Max. In Jersey." He nodded calmly.

As she went out, Orsini holding the door open for her, Dietrich said, "A charming girl."

"I think so." Martineau leaned over the chart table. "Are we to enjoy an uneventful run tonight? I understand your convoys are often attacked by RAF night fighters."

"Frequently, Standartenführer," Dietrich told him. "But the RAF will be busy elsewhere tonight." He gathered up his charts. "Now, if you will follow me, we'll go on board."

THE convoy, eleven ships in all, left Granville just after ten o'clock. On the bridge of the *Victor Hugo* it was like being in a safe and enclosed world, rain and spray drifting against the glass. Savary stood beside the helmsman. Sarah and Guido Orsini leaned over the chart table as he showed her the convoy route.

She liked Orsini. He was too handsome, really, in a way that Latins could be sometimes, but there was strength there too.

"Come to the saloon," he said. "I'll get you a coffee, and you can use my cabin if you'd like to lie down."

Savary turned. "Not just now, Count. I want to check the engine room. You'll have to take the bridge." He went out.

"Count?" Sarah said, raising her eyebrows.

"There are lots of counts in Italy. Don't let it worry you."

He offered her a cigarette and they smoked in companionable silence, looking out into the night, the noise of the engines a muted throbbing.

"I thought Italy capitulated last year?" she said.

"Oh, it did, except for those Fascist fanatics who decided to fight on under the Germans."

"Are you a Fascist?"

He looked down into that appealing young face. "To be honest, I'm not anything. I loathe politics. It reminds me of the senator in Rome who's supposed to have said, 'Don't tell my mother I'm in politics. She thinks I play the piano in a brothel.' "

She laughed. "I like that."

"Most of my former comrades are now working with the British and American navies. I, on the other hand, was on special assignment to serve with the Fifth E-boat Flotilla in Cherbourg. When Italy decided to sue for peace, there wasn't a great deal I could do about it, and I didn't fancy a prison camp. Of course, I'm not allowed to command an E-boat anymore. I suppose they think I might roar across to England."

"Would you?"

Savary returned to the bridge at that moment, and the Italian said, "Right. Let's go below now and get that coffee."

CAPTAIN Karl Muller, the officer in command of the Secret Field Police in Jersey, sat in his office in the Silvertide Hotel, at Havre des Pas, and worked his way through a bulky file. It was wholly devoted to anonymous letters, the tip-offs that led to whatever success his unit enjoyed. The crimes were varied. Anything from possession of an illegal radio to involvement in the black market. It was all very small beer, of course. Nothing like it had been at Gestapo headquarters in Paris. Unfortunately, a young Frenchwoman he had been interrogating there had died without disclosing any names. She had been involved with the principal Resistance circuit in Paris, and in the eyes of his superiors he'd botched things badly. The posting to this island backwater had followed. Now he was seeking any way he could to get back into the mainstream of things.

He stood up, a shade under six feet, with hair that was still dark brown in spite of the fact that he was in his fiftieth year. He stretched, and as he went to the window to look out at the weather, the phone rang. He picked it up. "Yes."

It wasn't a local call; he could tell by the crackling. "Captain Muller? This is Schroeder, port officer at Granville. . . ."

Ten minutes later there was a knock on Muller's door. The two men who entered were, like Muller, in civilian clothes. The GFP never wore uniforms if they could help it. The one who led the way was broad and squat, with a Slavic face and hard gray eyes. This was Inspector Willi Kleist, Muller's second-in-command, also from the Gestapo. They had known each other for years. The man with him was much younger, with fair hair, blue eyes and a weak mouth. This was Sergeant Ernst Greiser.

"An interesting development," Muller said. "I've had Schroeder on the phone from Granville. Apparently an SD Standartenführer presented himself on the quay with a young Frenchwoman and demanded passage to Jersey. He's traveling under a special warrant from Reichsführer Himmler. According to Schroeder, it's countersigned by the Führer."

"My God!" Greiser said.

"So, my friends, we must be ready for him. You were going to take care of the passenger checks when the convoy ships get into St. Helier, isn't that so, Ernst?" he inquired of Greiser.

"Yes, Herr Captain."

"Inspector Kleist and I will join you. Whatever his reason for being here, I want to be in on the action. I'll see you later."

The two men went out. Muller went to the window and stared out into the darkness, more excited than he had been in months.

IT WAS just after eleven p.m. when Helen de Ville took the tray up to her room, using the back staircase that led from the kitchen. None of the officers ever used it. They kept strictly to their own end of the house. In any case, she was careful. Only one cup on the tray. Everything for one. If she chose to have a late supper in her room, that was her affair.

She went into the bedroom, locking the door behind her, then crossed to the bookshelves, opened the secret entrance and moved inside, closing it again before going up the narrow stairs.

Kelso was sitting up in bed reading by the light of an oil lamp. A heavy curtain was drawn across the gable window. He looked up and smiled. "What have we got here?"

"Not much. Tea, but at least it's the real stuff, and a cheese sandwich. I make my own cheese these days, so you'd better like it." She sat down on the end of the bed while he ate, and noticed the photo of his wife and daughters on the bedside table. She picked it up. "Do you think of them often?"

"All the time. They mean everything to me—all I ever wanted. Simple as that. Then the war came along and messed things up."

"Yes, it has a bad habit of doing that."

"Still, I can't complain. Comfortable bed, decent cooking, and the oil lamp gives things a nicely old-fashioned atmosphere."

"They cut off the electricity at nine o'clock sharp," she said. "That's why you've got that oil lamp."

"Are things really as bad as that?"

"Yes, they are. In fact, you're lucky to have that cup of tea. Elsewhere in the island it would be made from parsnips or blackberry leaves. Not one of life's great experiences."

She smiled and plumped up his pillows. "I'm going to bed now."

"The big day tomorrow," he said.

"If we're to believe the message Savary brought." She picked up the tray. "Try and get some sleep."

Orsini had given Sarah his cabin. It was very small, hot and stuffy, and the noise of the engine churning below gave her a headache. She lay on the bunk and closed her eyes and tried to relax. All of a sudden the ship seemed to stagger. An illusion, of course. She sat up, and there was an explosion.

Things appeared to happen in slow motion after that. The ship was perfectly still, and there was another violent explosion, which caused the walls to tremble. She cried out and tried to stand up, and then the floor tilted and she fell against the door. Her handbag was thrown from the locker top. She picked it up automatically and attempted to open the cabin door, but it was stuck fast. She shook the handle desperately, and then the door opened so unexpectedly that she was hurled back against the opposite wall.

Orsini stood in the entrance, his face wild. "Move!" he ordered. "We've been hit twice. Torpedo attack. We've only got minutes. This old tub will go down like a stone."

They went up the companionway to the deserted saloon. He took off his reefer coat and held it out to her. "Get this on." She did as she was told, stuffing her handbag into one of the coat's ample pockets. He pulled her arms roughly through a life jacket, and put one on himself as he led the way out onto the deck.

There was a scene of indescribable confusion as the crew tried to launch the boats and, above them, the machine-gun crew fired into the night. Fire arced toward them in return, raking the bridge, where Savary stood. He cried out in terror and jumped over the rail, bouncing off some bales of hay in the deck cargo below.

Orsini pushed Sarah down behind some sacks of coal. At the same moment there was another explosion, and a portion of the deck in the stern disintegrated, flames billowing into the night. The entire ship tilted sharply. Sarah fell on her back and felt herself slide down the slippery deck. Then the rail dipped under and she was in the water.

THE E-boat surged forward within seconds of the first explosion, and Dietrich scanned the darkness with his night glasses. Martineau almost lost his balance at the sudden burst of speed and hung on grimly. "What is it?"

"I'm not sure," Dietrich said. Then flames blossomed in the night five hundred yards away, and he focused on the *Victor Hugo*. A dark shape flashed across the patch of light like a shadow, and then another. "British MTBs. They've hit the *Hugo*."

He pressed the button on the battle-stations alarm and the ugly sound of the klaxon rose above the roaring of the engines. Already the crew were moving to their stations. The Bofors gun and the well-deck cannon started to fire.

The only thing Martineau could think of was Sarah, and he grabbed Dietrich by the sleeve. "But we must help the people on that ship."

"Later!" Dietrich shrugged him aside. "This is business. Now keep out of the way."

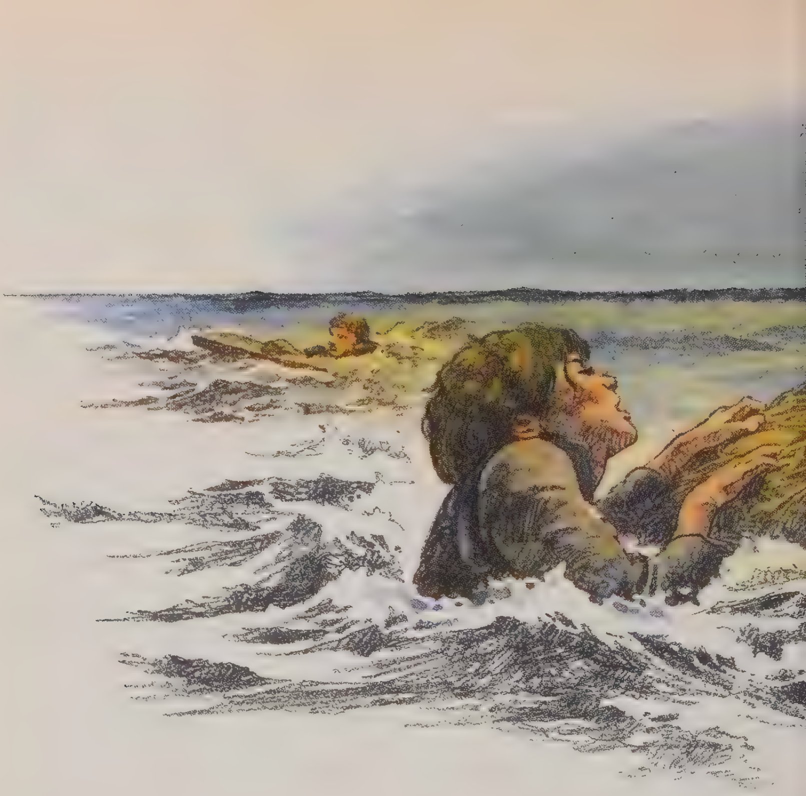
SARAH kicked desperately to get as far from the ship as possible. There was burning oil on the water toward the stern, and men were swimming hard to get away from it as it advanced.

She moved awkwardly because of the life jacket, and the reefer coat was bulky, saturated with water. But she realized now why Orsini had given it to her, as the cold started to eat at her legs.

There was wreckage floating everywhere, the bales of hay from the deck cargo buoyant in the water. A hand grabbed her life jacket from behind, and she turned and Orsini was there. He towed her toward one of the bales, and they clung to its binding ropes. "Who were they?" she gasped.

"British torpedo boats, MTBs."

There was a mighty rushing sound in the night and machine-



gun bullets churned the water as an MTB carved its way through men and wreckage. A tracer flashed through the darkness in a great arc. A moment later a parachute flare illuminated the scene.

Good Lord, Sarah thought, what a way to go. My own people trying to kill me. She hung on to the rope and said, gasping, "Did they have to do that? Machine-gun men in the water?"

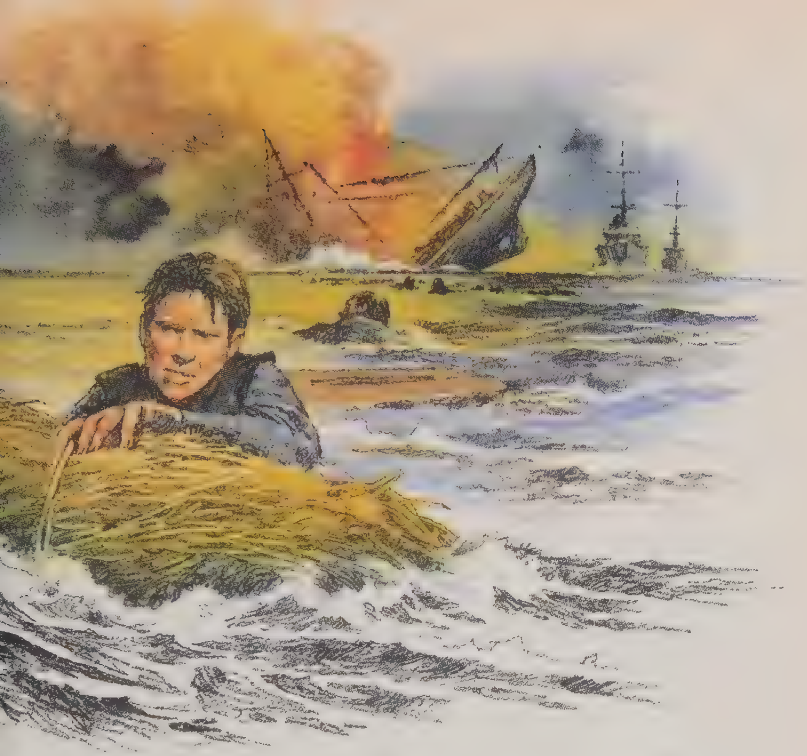
"War, cara, is a nasty business. It makes everyone crazy. Are you managing?"

"My arms are tired."

A hatch drifted by and he swam to it and towed it toward her. "Let's get you onto this."

It was a struggle, but she finally managed it. "What about you?"

"I'll be fine hanging on. Don't worry, I've been in the water before. My luck is good, so stick with me."



She laughed shakily. "There's nothing like the Channel Islands for a holiday at this time of the year. Perfect for sea bathing," and then she realized, to her horror, that she'd spoken in English.

He floated there, staring up at her, and then said in excellent English, "I knew there was something different about you from the first moment, cara." He laughed. "Which means there's also something unusual about the good Standartenführer Vogel."

"Please," she said desperately.

"Don't worry, cara. I fell in love with you the moment you came through the door of that hut on the quay. I like you, and I don't like them—whoever they are. We Italians are a simple people."

He coughed, rubbing oil from his face, and she reached for his hand. "You saved my life, Guido."

There was the sound of a throttled-down engine approaching. Guido glanced over his shoulder and saw an armed trawler. "Yes," he said. "I'm pleased to say I probably did."

A moment later the trawler was looming above them, a net over the side. Two German sailors clambered down, reaching for Sarah, and pulled her up. Guido followed and collapsed on the deck beside her.

A young lieutenant came down the ladder from the bridge and hurried forward. "Guido, is that you?" he said in German.

"As ever was, Bruno," Guido answered in the same language.

"And, Fräulein, are you all right? We must get you to my cabin."

"Mademoiselle Latour, Bruno, and she speaks no German," Guido told him in French. He smiled at Sarah and helped her to her feet. "Now let's take you below."

Chapter Six

As Sarah pulled the heavy white sweater over her head there was a knock on the door of Bruno's cabin. She opened it, and a young sailor announced in French, "We're entering St. Helier harbor."

He left, and she went to the basin to do something with her hair. The effects of the salt water had made it a tangled mess.

The contents of the handbag that she had stuffed into a pocket of Orsini's reefer before leaving the *Victor Hugo* had survived surprisingly well. Her identity card and other papers had been soaked, of course. She had laid them out on the hot-water pipes to dry, and now she replaced them all in her handbag and retrieved the small pistol from under the pillow.

There was a knock and Guido came in. "How are you?" he asked in French.

"Fine," she said, "except for the hair. I look like a scarecrow."

He was carrying a Kriegsmarine reefer coat. "Put this on. It's a damp morning out there."

Up on the bridge, Sarah looked down upon a scene familiar from her childhood. St. Helier harbor, Elizabeth Castle on her left in the bay, the Albert Pier, the sprawl of the town itself. The same and yet not the same. Military strongpoints everywhere and the harbor more crammed with vessels than she had ever known it. Dockers were already starting to unload the barges, and there seemed to be soldiers everywhere.

"Where's the E-boat?" she asked Guido as she leaned on the bridge rail beside him and Lieutenant Bruno Feldt.

"Probably having a last look for survivors," he said as they nosed in toward the Albert Pier.

"No sign of Savary," he added.

"Someone else may have picked him up," said Bruno Feldt. "I see the GFP are ready and waiting."

"GFP?" Sarah asked in a deliberate display of ignorance. "What's that?"

"Geheime Feldpolizei," Guido told her. "The tall one, Captain Muller, is on loan from the Gestapo. So is the thug next to him, the one built like a brick wall. That's Inspector Willi Kleist. The young one with the fair hair is Sergeant Ernst Greiser."

The three GFP officers hurried up the gangway when it went across, and Muller was first on the bridge, followed by Kleist.

"Herr Leutnant." Muller nodded to Feldt. "You had quite a night of it, I hear." He turned to Sarah and said in French, "You were a passenger on the *Hugo*, mademoiselle . . .?"

"Latour," Orsini put in. "We were in the water together."

Muller nodded. "You lost your papers?"

"No," she said. "I have them here." She took the handbag from her pocket and started to open it. Muller held out his hand. "The bag, if you please, mademoiselle."

There was a moment's pause. Everyone waited. Then Sarah handed it to him. "Of course."

Muller turned to Bruno Feldt. "We'll use your cabin for a few minutes, if we may."

Guido squeezed Sarah's arm and whispered quickly, "I'll wait for you, cara, and if the colonel doesn't arrive, you can come up to my billet at de Ville Place. My landlady will look after you."

Muller followed as Sarah led him down the companionway and back into Lieutenant Feldt's cabin. Kleist leaned against the open door.

"So, mademoiselle." Muller sat on the bed, turned the handbag upside down and emptied it. Her papers fell out, her makeup case and also the pistol. He made no comment. He opened her

French identity card, examined it, then replaced everything carefully in the bag. Only then did he pick up the pistol. "You are aware that there is only one penalty for a civilian caught in possession of any kind of firearm?"

"Yes," Sarah said.

"This is yours, I take it?"

"Certainly. It was a gift from a friend. He was concerned for my safety. These are troubled times, Captain."

"And what kind of friend would encourage you to break the law so flagrantly?"

There was a footstep outside, and a cold voice said in German, "Perhaps you should address that question to me."

Harry Martineau stood in the doorway. He presented a supremely menacing figure in the SS uniform and black leather trench coat.

Karl Muller knew the devil when he met him face to face and got to his feet very fast indeed. "Standartenführer."

"You are?"

"Captain Karl Muller, in charge of Geheime Feldpolizei here in Jersey. This is my second-in-command, Inspector Kleist."

"My name is Vogel." Martineau took out his SD pass and handed it over. Muller examined it and passed it back. Martineau produced the Himmler warrant. "Read that."

Muller did as he was told, folded the letter and handed it back. "In what way can I serve you, Standartenführer?"

"Mademoiselle Latour travels under my protection." Martineau picked up the pistol and put it back in her handbag. "She has done me the honor of choosing my friendship. There are those among her countrymen who do not approve. I prefer that she should be in a position to defend herself should any unfortunate situation arise."

"Of course, Standartenführer."

"Good. Then kindly wait for me on deck."

Muller didn't even hesitate. "Certainly, Standartenführer." He nodded to Kleist and they went out.

Martineau closed the door. He smiled suddenly, changing from Vogel into Harry. "You look awful. Are you all right?"

"Yes," she said. "Thanks to Guido."

"Guido, is it?"

"He saved my life, Harry. It was awful. Burning oil, men dying." She shuddered. Then she added, "We've got a problem. At one point when we were in the water I spoke to Guido in English."

"Good Lord!"

She put up a hand defensively. "It was very confusing out there. Anyway, he speaks good English himself."

"Stop!" Martineau said. "It gets worse."

"He's no Fascist, Harry. He's an Italian aristocrat who doesn't give a care about politics, stuck here because he happened to be in the wrong place when the Italian government capitulated."

"But why should he go to all this trouble for you?"

"He likes me. You know what these Latins are like."

She smiled mischievously, and Martineau shook his head. "Age nineteen, they told me. A hundred and nineteen more like."

"Another thing. Guido's billeted with Aunt Helen at de Ville Place. He was going to take me up there if you hadn't arrived."

"Perfect," Martineau said. "As for the other business, we'll tell him your mother was English and that you've kept quiet about it during the occupation years in case it caused you any problems."

"Will he believe it?"

"I don't see why not. Are you going to be all right for clothes?"

"Yes. I've got everything I need in the suitcase. Good thing it traveled with you on the E-boat."

They went up the companionway. Muller was standing on the bridge talking to Feldt and Orsini.

Martineau spoke to Orsini in French. "Anne-Marie tells me you are billeted in most congenial circumstances. Some country house called de Ville Place?"

"That's right, Colonel."

Martineau turned to Muller. "It sounds as if it would suit my needs exactly. Would there be any objection?"

Muller, eager to please, said, "None at all, Standartenführer. It has, by tradition, been allocated to officers of the Kriegsmarine, but the owner is seven or eight below her full complement."

"I'll take you up there now, if you like," Orsini offered. "I have a car parked at the end of the pier."

"Very well," Martineau said. "I suggest we get moving, then."

They went down the gangway to the pier and a Kriegsmarine sailor picked up the two suitcases and followed. Orsini and Sarah walked in front; Martineau followed with Muller at his side.

"Naturally, once I'm settled in, I'll return to town to pay my respects to the military commandant, Colonel Heine. I will need a vehicle. A Kübelwagen would be best, in case I wish to use it over rough country." The Kübelwagen was the German army's equivalent of the jeep.

"No problem, Standartenführer. I will also provide a driver."

"Not necessary," Martineau said. "I prefer to do things for myself. I'll find my way about your little island, believe me."

"Could I ask the purpose of your visit, Standartenführer?"

"I am here on special instructions from Reichsführer Himmler himself, countersigned by the Führer. You have seen my orders," Martineau told him. "Are you querying them?"

"Certainly not."

"Good." They had reached Orsini's Morris sedan, and the sailor was stowing the suitcases in the trunk. "You will be informed of my movements if and when necessary. In the meantime, have that Kübelwagen delivered to me."

Sarah was already in the back, Orsini behind the wheel. Martineau got into the front passenger seat. As the Italian drove away, Martineau said to Orsini, "I believe there's a misunderstanding to be cleared up. Anne-Marie has a Breton father but an English mother. She felt it sensible to keep quiet about this in case it caused problems with the occupying powers."

"You may rely on my discretion," Orsini said. "The last thing I would wish to do is embarrass Mademoiselle Latour in any way."

"Good," Martineau said. "I felt sure you'd understand."

Back in his office at the Silvertide Hotel, Muller sat behind his desk thinking. After a while he flipped on the intercom. "Ask Inspector Kleist and Sergeant Greiser to come in."

He went to the window and looked out. The tide, still advancing, blanketed the rocks on the shore with white foam.

The door opened and the two policemen entered. "You wanted us, Herr Captain?" Kleist asked.

"Yes, Willi." Muller sat down and leaned back in his chair. He said to Greiser, "Ernst, didn't your brother use to work at Gestapo headquarters in Berlin?"

"Yes, Herr Captain, but now he's at Stuttgart headquarters, in charge of criminal records," Greiser said.

"He must still have connections in Berlin. Book a call through to him. Ask about Vogel. I remember being told when I was a young detective that no matter how good an egg looks, if it smells, there's something wrong. And this smells, Ernst. I'd like to know more about Standartenführer Vogel."

"Shall I telex? It would be quicker."

"I want a judicious inquiry, you fool," Muller told him wearily. "Not a public one."

"But I would remind you, sir, that calls for Germany are routed via Cherbourg and Paris. They've been taking fifteen or sixteen hours recently, even at priority level."

"Then book one now, Ernst." The young man went out, and Muller said to Kleist, "See about a Kübelwagen. Have it delivered to de Ville Place. Let's keep him happy for the time being."

In the kitchen at de Ville Place, Helen was rolling out pastry dough made from potato flour when Gallagher came in. She looked up. "Good. You can clean the fish for me," she said.

There were some plaice on a marble slab beside the sink. Gallagher took a knife from his pocket. When he pressed one end, a razor-sharp double-edged blade sprang into view.

"I loathe that thing," Helen said.

As he started to clean the fish Gallagher said, "When my old grandfather was twelve, he made his first trip in a schooner from Jersey to Newfoundland to fish for cod. This knife was his father's gift to him. He left it to me in his will. Knives, guns—it's how they're used that's important, Helen."

At that moment there was the sound of a car drawing up outside. "That's probably Guido," Helen said.

There were steps in the passageway, and Guido came in carrying two suitcases.

"A good passage?" Helen asked.

"No, the *Hugo* was torpedoed. Savary is missing." Sarah stepped in through the door, followed by Martineau. Orsini carried on. "This is Anne-Marie Latour. She was a passenger on the *Hugo*, and this is Standartenführer Vogel."

Helen looked bewildered. "What can I do for you?"

"Put us up, Mrs. de Ville." Martineau spoke in English. "I'm in Jersey for a few days. We need quarters."

"Impossible," Helen told him. "This is a billet for officers of the Kriegsmarine only."

"And you are well short of your full complement," Martineau told her. "If you would be kind enough, therefore, to show us to a suitable room."

Helen was angrier than she had been in years—with the ice-cold assurance of the man, the SS uniform and the silly little tart traveling with him.

Guido said hurriedly, "Right. I'm going to have a bath and catch up on a little sleep. I'll see you all later."

The door closed behind him. Helen pushed Gallagher out of the way angrily, washing the potato flour from her hands under the tap. She was aware of the SS officer still at the door.

Very softly a voice said, "Aunt Helen, don't you know me?" Helen went quite still. Gallagher was looking over her shoulder in astonishment. "Uncle Sean?" And then as Helen turned, "It's me, Aunt Helen. It's Sarah."

Helen moved forward and grabbed her by the shoulders, gazing at her searchingly. With recognition there were sudden tears in her eyes. She ran her fingers through the girl's hair. "Oh, my dear, Sarah, what have they done to you?" And then they were in each other's arms.

GALLAGHER led Martineau upstairs to the chamber and introduced him to Hugh Kelso. After talking awhile, Kelso asked, "So, what happens now? You obviously had quite a trip just getting to Jersey, so where do we go from here?" There was impatience in his voice.

Martineau said, "I just got here, my friend. Give me time to catch my breath. When it's time to go, you'll be the first to know."

"Does that include a bullet in the head, Colonel?" Kelso demanded. "If that's the decision, do we get to talk about it or just do it?"

Martineau didn't bother to answer. He simply went downstairs and waited in the master bedroom for Gallagher. When the Irishman came down, he closed the secret door and shrugged. "He's had a hard time, and that leg gives him a lot of pain."

"We're all in pain one way or another," Martineau said.

As he turned to leave, Gallagher put a hand on his shoulder. "Could he be right? About the bullet in the head, I mean?"

"Maybe," Martineau said. "We'll have to see, won't we?"

A short time later Sarah finished washing her hair, using some homemade soft soap Helen had provided. But she still looked a mess. When Helen came into the bathroom, she said, "It's no good. You need a hairdresser."

"Are there still such things?"

"Oh, yes, if you go into St. Helier."

She tried combing the girl's hair into some semblance of a style, and Sarah said, "What's life been like for you here?"

"Not too bad if we behave ourselves. A lot of the time the Germans are all right, but step out of line and see what happens. You have to do as you're told, you see." She finished combing. "There, that's the best I can do." She helped Sarah pull her dress over her head and zip it up. "You and Martineau? What's the situation there? He's old enough to be your father."

"My father he very definitely is not." Sarah smiled as she pulled on her shoes. "He's probably the most infuriating man I've ever met, but he's also the most fascinating."

"And to think that the last time I saw you, you had pigtails! Now let's go and have some tea."

In the kitchen, Helen put two spoonfuls of her precious China tea into the pot while Sarah and Martineau sat at the table talking and smoking. There was a knock at the door. When Helen opened it, Willi Kleist stood there. "We've brought your Kübelwagen, Standartenführer."

Martineau went out to have a look at it. The canvas top was up and the body was camouflaged. "That seems satisfactory."

"If there's anything else we can do . . ."

"I don't think so."

"By the way, Captain Muller wanted me to tell you that Colonel Heine will be at the town hall this afternoon, if you'd care to call in and see him. I understand he's leaving for Guernsey in the morning for a meeting with General von Schmettow."

"Thank you, I will pay him a visit."

Ernst Greiser was sitting at the wheel of a black Citroën. Kleist got in beside him and they drove away. Martineau went back inside. "Transport taken care of. I'll go into town this afternoon, call on Heine, the military commandant, and then I'll visit Muller."

"You'd better go in with him and get your hair done," Helen told Sarah. She turned to Martineau. "There's a good hairdresser close to the town hall."

"Fine," he said. "But first I feel like a breath of air. How about showing me round the estate, Sarah?"

AFTER leaving de Ville Place, Kleist and Greiser started down the road, but after about a quarter of a mile, the inspector touched the young man on the arm. "Pull onto that track, Ernst. Over there. We'll walk back through the woods."

"Any particular reason?"

"I'd just like to have a look around, that's all."

The cart track was heavily overgrown. Greiser drove along it until they were out of sight of the road. They got out and left the Citroën there, taking a field path that crossed the woods of the de Ville estate. It was quiet and really rather pleasant.

Then a young woman carrying a basket appeared unexpectedly from beyond the high granite wall at the end of the field. It was impossible to see her face, but her cotton frock was tight enough to reveal, even at that distance, a body that was full and ripe. She didn't notice them and followed the path into the wood.

Kleist said, "Now, that's interesting." He turned to Greiser and smiled. "Would you say we should investigate, Sergeant?"

"Very definitely, Herr Inspector," the younger man said eagerly, and they quickened their pace.

The young woman was in fact Mary, the daughter of Helen's housekeeper, Mrs. Vibert. The woman had promised Helen de Ville some eggs for the evening meal, and it was these that the girl was taking to the house now.

She was only sixteen and already blossoming into womanhood. She loved the countryside, and was never happier than when walking alone in the woods. Some little way in, there was an old granite barn, long disused, the roof gaping. It always made her feel afraid, and yet she was drawn to it by a strange fascination. She paused, then walked across the grass between crumbled walls to peer inside.

A harsh voice called, "Now, then. What do you think you're doing?"

She turned quickly and saw Kleist and Greiser advancing.

At the same moment Sean Gallagher was walking down to the south meadow, where he had three cows grazing. He noticed the Germans walking toward the wood, and then he recognized Mary. He paused, shading his eyes against the sun, saw the girl disappear into the trees, the Germans following. Suddenly uneasy, he started to hurry. It was when he was halfway across the field that he heard the first scream. He cursed softly and broke into a run.

THE weather was the best of the spring, delightfully warm as Sarah and Martineau followed the track from the house through the pine trees. There were daffodils everywhere, crocuses and snowdrops in profusion, camellias blooming.

Sarah held his arm as they strolled along. "Oh, that wonderful, marvelous smell. Straight back to my childhood and those long, hot summers. Did they ever exist, I wonder, or was it all an impossible dream?"

"No," he said. "They were the only true reality. It's the past four years that have been the nightmare."

"I love this place," she said. "It's home. Here I belong. Where do you belong, Harry?"

"A stateless person, that's me," he said lightly. "For years an American living and working in Europe. No family left worth speaking of." He was upset, and it showed in a sudden angry unease. "I just don't belong anywhere. Maybe the man upstairs made a mistake. Perhaps I should have died in those trenches back in 1918."

She pulled him around, angry. "That's a terrible thing to say!"

There was a sudden scream. They turned and looked down through the trees to the barn in the clearing and saw Mary struggling in Kleist's arms, Greiser standing to one side, laughing.

"For heaven's sake, Harry, do something," Sarah said.

"I will, only you stay out of it." He started down the slope as Sean Gallagher ran out of the trees.

KLEIST was excited, the young body squirming against him. "Shut up!" he told her. "Just be a good girl and I won't hurt you."

Greiser's eyes were shining, his mouth loose. "Don't forget, Inspector, fair shares for all, that's my motto."

Gallagher arrived on the run, shouldering the sergeant aside. As he reached Kleist he stamped hard behind the German's left knee, causing the leg to buckle, and punched him hard in the kidneys. Kleist grunted and went down, releasing the terrified girl.

Gallagher picked up Mary's basket and gave it to her. "It's all right now," he said. "You run on up to the house."

She ran like a frightened rabbit. As Gallagher turned, Greiser took a Mauser from his pocket, his eyes wild. Kleist called, "No, Ernst, he's mine." He got up, easing his back, and took off his raincoat. "Like all the Irish, you're cracked in the head. Now I shall teach you a lesson. I shall break both your arms."

"Half Irish, so only half cracked." Sean Gallagher took off his jacket and tossed it to one side.

Kleist began circling him, then rushed in and swung a tremendous punch, which Gallagher avoided with ease. Gallagher then ducked in and landed a punch under the German's left eye.

Every punch the German threw was sidestepped, and in return Gallagher seemed to be able to hit him wherever he wanted. On the hillside a few yards away, Sarah and Martineau watched as the Irishman drove the inspector back across the grass.

And then there was a sudden moment of disaster, for as Gallagher moved in, his right foot slipped on the grass and he began to fall. Kleist seized his chance, lifting a knee into Gallagher's face and kicking him in the side as he went down. Gallagher rolled away with surprising speed and came up on one knee. "Lord save us, you can't even kick straight."

Kleist rushed at him. Gallagher slipped to one side, tripping the German, so that he went headfirst into the wall of the barn. Kleist cried out sharply, swayed and fell.

Gallagher swung around to find Greiser confronting him with the Mauser, but in the same moment a shot rang out, kicking up dirt at Greiser's feet. They turned as Martineau walked into the small clearing, Walther in hand. "Put it away!" he ordered.

Greiser stood there staring at him, and it was Kleist, getting to his feet, who said hoarsely, "Do as he says, Ernst."

Greiser obeyed and Martineau said, "Good. You are, of course, a disgrace to everything the Reich stands for. This I shall discuss with your commanding officer later. Now leave."

The two men walked rapidly away through the trees.

Sarah came up to Gallagher, took out a handkerchief and wiped blood from his mouth. "I never realized what a deadly combination it could be," she said. "Jersey blood mixed with Irish."

"A fine day for it, thanks be to God." Gallagher squinted up at the sun through the trees. "Better times coming." He grinned and turned to Martineau. "You wouldn't happen to have a cigarette on you? I seem to have left mine at home."

MARTINEAU and Sarah drove down through St. Aubin and along toward Bel Royal, passing a number of fortifications and gun positions on the way. The sky was very blue, the sun bright, the temperature surprisingly warm. Sarah leaned back in the Kübelwagen and closed her eyes. "This island has a special smell to it in spring. Nothing quite like it anywhere in the world." She opened her eyes again. "Tell me something. Why have you taken off your uniform?"

He was wearing the leather military trench coat, but underneath was a gray tweed suit and white shirt, with a black tie. The slouch hat was also in black, the brim down at the front and back.

"Tactics," he said. "I don't need to appear in uniform if I don't want to. SD officers wear civilian clothes most of the time. It emphasizes their power." He pulled in at the side of the road and switched off the engine. "Let's take a walk."

He helped her out and they crossed to the seawall. Below, on the sands, children played, their mothers sitting against the wall, faces turned to the sun. A number of German soldiers swam in the sea, two or three young women among them.

"Unexpectedly domestic, isn't it?" Martineau said.

The soldiers glanced at them, attracted by the girl, but turned from his dark stare. "Yes," she said. "Not at all what I expected."

"If you look closely, you'll see that most of the soldiers on the beach are boys. Twenty years old at most. Difficult to hate. When someone's a Nazi, you know where you stand. But the average twenty-year-old German in uniform"—he shrugged—"is just a twenty-year-old in uniform."

Neither of them spoke for a time. Then Sarah said, "When it's all over, Harry, what will happen to you?" She turned to look at him, her face strained and intense.

He stared out to sea, eyes very dark. "When I was young, I used to love railway stations, especially at night—the smell of the steam, the dying fall of a train whistle in the distance, the platforms in those great deserted Victorian palaces—waiting to go somewhere, anywhere. I loved it and yet I also used to get a feeling of tremendous dread. Something to do with getting on the wrong train." He turned to her. "And once the train's on its way, you can't get off."

"The station is ominous at midnight," she said softly. "Hope is a dead letter."

He stared at her. "Where did you hear that?"

"One of your bad poems," she said. "That first day I met you at the cottage the brigadier was reading it. You took it from him, crumpled it up and threw it into the fireplace."

"And you retrieved it?" For a moment she thought he would be angry. Instead, he smiled. "Wait here." He left her, crossed to the Kübelwagen and opened the door. When he returned he was carrying a small Kodak camera. "Helen gave me this. As the film is four years old, she can't guarantee the results."

He walked up to a soldier standing nearby. There was a brief exchange; then Martineau gave him the camera and returned to stand beside Sarah. "Don't forget to smile."

Sarah took his arm. "What's this for?"

"Something to remember me by."

It made her feel uneasy, and she held his arm more tightly. The soldier took the photo and returned the camera, smiling shyly, and walked away. "Did you tell him who you were?" she asked.

"Of course I did." He took her arm. "Let's get going. I've got things to do while you're at the hairdresser's."

KARL MULLER PRIDED HIMSELF on his remarkable lack of emotion in all situations, his self-control. He thought of it as his greatest asset, and yet, standing by the window in his office at the Silvertide Hotel, it almost deserted him for the first time.

"You *what?*" he demanded.

Kleist's face was in a dreadful state—the flesh around his eyes was purple, his nose was broken and swollen. "A misunderstanding, Herr Captain."

Muller turned to Greiser. "And that's your version also? A misunderstanding?"

"We were only questioning the girl, Herr Captain. She panicked. Then Gallagher arrived. He placed entirely the wrong construction on the affair."

"As your face proves, Willi," Muller said. "And Vogel was involved?"

"He arrived on the scene at an unfortunate moment," Greiser told him. "He also placed the wrong construction on things."

Muller was furious. "Leaving me to get you off the hook when he turns up here this afternoon. Go on, get out of my sight!" He turned to the window and slammed his palm against the wall.

MARTINEAU parked near the entrance of the town hall, with its Nazi flag flying and a Luftwaffe sentry with a rifle on the step. He and Sarah walked along York Street until they came to a doorway between two shops. The sign indicated that the hairdresser was upstairs. Sarah said, "I remember this place."

"Will you be recognized?"

"I shouldn't think so. The last time I was in here to have my hair cut I was ten years old."

"I must keep my appointment with Colonel Heine at the town hall," Martineau said. "I'll see you later."

He strolled back to the town hall and saw a policeman in traditional British bobby's uniform talking to the sentry. They stopped talking, watching him as he approached.

"Standartenführer Vogel, for the commandant."

The sentry jumped to attention. "The commandant arrived twenty minutes ago, Standartenführer. Please enter."

Martineau moved into the hall and found an army sergeant sitting at a table at the bottom of the stairs. "My name is Vogel. I believe Colonel Heine is expecting me."

The sergeant leaped to his feet and picked up the phone, and within moments there was the sound of boots on the stairs. Martineau turned to find a young man hurrying down, an infantry major, no more than thirty from the look of him.

He was all cordiality, pausing briefly to click his heels before putting out a hand. "Major Felix Necker, Standartenführer."

He'd seen action; that was plain enough from the shrapnel scar running into his right eye, as well as the Iron Cross First Class he wore and the Infantry Assault Badge.

"A pleasure to meet you, Herr Major," Martineau said.

They went upstairs. Necker tapped on a door, opened it and stood to one side as Martineau went in first. The officer who stood up and came around the desk to meet him was a type he recognized instantly. A little stiff in manner, old-fashioned regular army and definitely no Nazi. An officer and a gentleman.

"Standartenführer. A pleasure to see you."

"Colonel Heine." Martineau produced his SD card.

Heine examined it and handed it back. "Please sit down. You've met Felix Necker, of course. My second-in-command. In what way can I serve you?"

Martineau took out the Himmler letter and passed it across.

Heine read it slowly, his face grave, then passed it to Necker. "If I could know the purpose of your visit?"

"Not at this stage." Martineau took the letter back from Necker. "All I need is assurance of total cooperation as required."

"That goes without saying. I will inform all unit commanders of your presence." Heine hesitated. "There is one thing. I go to Guernsey in the morning. A weekend conference with General von Schmettow."

Martineau turned to Necker. "You will be left in command?"

"That is correct."

"Then I can see no problem." He got to his feet. "A pleasure to meet you, Herr Colonel. Don't bother to see me out, Major."

The door closed behind him. Heine's whole demeanor changed. "My flesh always crawls when these SD people appear. What in the hell does he want, Felix?"

"Lord only knows, Herr Colonel, but his credentials . . ." Necker shrugged. "Not only signed by Himmler but by the Führer himself."

"I know." Heine put up a hand defensively. "Just watch him, and keep him sweet at all costs. Trouble with Himmler is the last thing we need."

MARTINEAU had time in hand, so he walked through the town. There were more civilians than soldiers about. Most people looked underweight, and their clothes were well worn. There were few children because they were at school. The ones he did see were in better shape than he had expected, but then, people always put their children first.

When he went upstairs to the salon, Sarah was adjusting her hat in the mirror. Her hair looked excellent. He helped her on with her coat, and they went outside to the Kübelwagen.

Martineau's next stop was the Silvertide Hotel, at Havre des Pas. He parked beside several other vehicles. "I shan't be long."

Sarah smiled. "Don't worry about me. I'll just take a walk along the seawall. I used to come to swim here when I was a kid."

"As you please. But try not to talk to anyone."

Muller had seen him arrive from the window of his office. When Martineau went inside, a young soldier was waiting to greet him. "Standartenführer Vogel? This way, please."

Martineau was ushered into Muller's office. The captain stood up behind the desk. "A great pleasure."

"I wish I could say the same," Martineau said. "You've spoken to Kleist and Greiser?"

"About this misunderstanding at de Ville Place? Yes, they—"

"Misunderstanding?" Martineau said coldly. "You will have them in here now, Herr Captain, if you please."

He turned away and stood at the window, hands behind his back, as Muller asked for Kleist and Greiser over the intercom. They came in only a few moments. Martineau didn't bother to turn around, but said softly, "Inspector Kleist, I understand you have put this morning's events down to a misunderstanding?"

"Well, yes, Standartenführer."

"Liar!" Martineau's voice was low and dangerous. "Both of you are liars." He turned to face Muller. "A child, Captain, barely sixteen, being dragged toward a barn by this animal here while the other stood and laughed. I was about to interfere when General Gallagher came on the scene and gave the bully the thrashing he deserved."

"I see," Muller said.

"Just to make things worse, I was obliged to draw my own pistol and fire a warning shot to prevent this idiot shooting Gallagher in the back." He then spoke slowly to Greiser, as if to a child. "The man is Irish, which means he is a neutral, and the Führer's declared policy is good relations with Ireland. We don't shoot people like that in the back. Understand?"

"Yes, Standartenführer."

Now he turned to Muller. "These men's actions are an affront to every ideal the Reich holds dear, and to German honor."

He was thoroughly enjoying himself, especially when Kleist's anger overflowed. "I'm not a child to be lectured like this."

"Kleist!" Martineau said. "As a member of the Gestapo you took an oath to our Führer of obedience unto death. Is it not so?"

"Yes," Kleist answered quietly.

"Then remember from now on that you are here to obey orders. And if I ask a question, you answer '*Jawohl*, Standartenführer.' Do you follow?"

There was a pause before Kleist said in a low voice, "*Jawohl*, Standartenführer."

Martineau turned to Muller. "And you wonder why Reichsführer Himmler thought it worthwhile sending me here?"

He walked out without another word, went through the foyer and crossed the road to the Kübelwagen. Sarah was sitting on the hood. "How did it go?" she asked.

"Oh, I think I put the fear of God in them rather satisfactorily. Now you can take me on a tour of this island of yours."

ROMMEL was staying at a villa deep in the countryside near Bayeux. It had been used as a weekend retreat by the commanding general of the area, who had been happy to offer it to the field marshal when he'd expressed a desire for a quiet weekend. The Bernards, who ran the house, were extremely discreet.

Baum and Hofer joined the field marshal in the drawing room.

"Right. Let's go over things," Rommel said.

"According to my information, the people from Jersey will leave for Guernsey at around ten tomorrow morning," Hofer began. "Berger and I will leave here at nine. We will drive to a Luftwaffe airstrip only ten kilometers away. There is a pilot, an Oberleutnant Sorsa, waiting there now under your personal order with a Fieseler Storch."

"Sorsa? Isn't that a Finnish name?" Rommel asked.

"That's right."

"Then what's he doing with the Luftwaffe? Why isn't he on the eastern front shooting down Russians with his own people?"

"Sorsa is hot stuff, a real ace. One of the greatest night-fighter pilots in the business. These days he's of more use flying over the Reich knocking down Lancaster bombers."

"They don't like us much, the Finns," Rommel said. "I've never trusted them." He lit a cigarette. "Still, carry on."

"Sorsa won't know his destination until we join the plane. I estimate we will land in Jersey around eleven. I've given orders for Berlin to be notified at noon that you've flown to Jersey."

"And what happens here?"

"Generals Stülpnagel and Falkenhausen arrive later in the day. Stay overnight and leave on Saturday. This couple here at the house, the Bernards, know you are here, but then they won't know you're supposed to be in Jersey."

Rommel turned to Baum. "And you, my friend, can you manage?"

"Yes, Herr Field Marshal. I really think I can," Baum told him.

"Good." Rommel took a bottle of Dom Pérignon from the ice bucket that Monsieur Bernard had brought in earlier and uncorked it. He filled three glasses. "So, my friends, to the Jersey enterprise."

DINNER at de Ville Place that evening was a strange affair. Martineau and Sarah joined Guido Orsini and several German officers in the main dining room. There was a fresh lighted candle at each empty place, which Sarah found rather macabre. But the young officers were polite and considerate and would obviously have put themselves out even more if it had not been for Martineau's presence. He was wearing his uniform in deference to the formality of the meal, and its effect on the others had been definitely depressing.

Helen de Ville passed in and out with the plates. Sarah, bored with the stilted conversation, insisted on helping her to clear the table and joined her in the kitchen, where Sean Gallagher sat eating the leftovers.

"Terrible in there. Harry's like a specter at the feast," she said.

Helen had just prepared a tray for Kelso. "I'll just take this up while they're all still in the dining room."

She went up the back stairs and opened the door to the master bedroom at the same moment that Guido Orsini passed the end of the corridor. He saw her, noted the tray in astonishment and moved cautiously along the corridor. He hesitated, then tried the door that Helen had just closed behind her. For once, she had omitted to turn the key. He peered inside, saw the secret door ajar and tiptoed across. He listened for a moment, then turned and went out again, closing the door.

Sarah and Gallagher were talking in low voices when he went into the kitchen. "Ah, there you are, mademoiselle. They're into politics now. Can I take you for a walk on the terrace?"

"Is he to be trusted?" she asked Gallagher.

"No more than most men I know, especially round a darling like you."

"I'll have to take a chance, then. If Colonel Vogel comes looking for me, tell him I'll be back soon," she added formally, and walked out with Guido.

There was a half-moon, the sky was bright with stars, and there was a luminosity to everything. Palm trees were etched against the sky. Everywhere there was the smell of flowers, drenched from the rain earlier.

"Azaleas." She breathed deeply. "One of my favorites."

"You are a remarkable girl," he said in English. "You don't mind if we use English, do you? There's no one about."

"All right," she said reluctantly, "but not for long."

"You've never been to Jersey before?"

She lied. "No. I was brought up by my grandmother in Paimpol after my mother died."

"I see. And it was your mother who was English?"

"That's right."

She was wary of his questioning and sat on a low granite wall, the moon behind her. He gave her a cigarette. "You speak French with a Breton accent."

"What's strange about that? My grandmother was Breton."

"And your English is interesting too. Very upper class."

"Really? I'm a lucky girl, then." She stood up. "I'd better get back now, Guido. Max can get rather restless if I'm out of his sight too long with another man."

"Of course." He took her arm, and they strolled back through the azaleas. "I like you, Anne-Marie Latour. I like you a lot. I want you to remember that."

Martineau appeared on the terrace in the moonlight. "Anne-Marie, are you there?" he shouted in French.

"Coming!" she called back, and reached to touch the Italian's face. "I'll see you tomorrow, Guido," and she ran up the steps to the terrace.

LATE that night they were all in the private sitting room at the back of the house—Gallagher, Martineau, Helen and Sarah. Gallagher poured burgundy into four glasses while Helen opened the French window a little. She breathed the perfumed air for a few moments, then drew the heavy curtains across.

"So, what happens now?" Sean Gallagher asked.

"Kelso certainly can't walk yet," Helen de Ville said.

"At least he's safe upstairs for the time being," said Sarah.

"He can't sit out the war there," Martineau pointed out. "We need to get him to Granville. Then Cresson can radio London and have a Lysander over, any night we want."

"But how to get him there, that's the thing." Gallagher sighed. "They've got the small-boat traffic under tight control here. Observation posts all along the coast, as you saw for yourself today."

"So what *is* the solution?" Sarah demanded. "We must do something soon."

There was a movement at the window, the curtains parted, and Guido Orsini stepped into the room. "Perhaps I can help," he said in English.

Chapter Seven

When the phone rang at command headquarters, Felix Necker was just about to leave to go riding on the beach at St. Aubin. He picked up the receiver and a look of horror appeared on his face. "My God! What's his estimated time of arrival? . . . All right. Arrange a guard of honor. I'll be there as soon as I can."

He slammed down the receiver, then picked it up again and dialed GFP headquarters at the Silvertide.

"Herr Major," Muller said when Necker's call was put through, "what can I do for you?"

"Rommel is due at the airport in forty-five minutes. He is arriving from Normandy in a Storch with his aide, a Major Hofer."

"But why?" Muller demanded. "I don't understand."

"Well, I do," Necker told him. "It all makes perfect sense. First of all he orders Heine and the others to join General von Schmettow in Guernsey for the weekend, getting them all nicely out of the way. Then he flies in out of the blue and takes the place apart. I know how Rommel operates, Muller. He'll check everything."

"At least one mystery is solved," Muller said.

"What's that?"

"The reason for Vogel being here. It all ties in now."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," Necker said. "Anyway, never mind that now. I'll see you at the airport."

He put down the receiver, hesitated, then picked it up again and told the operator to connect him with de Ville Place.

Helen answered the phone. "It's for you," she said to Martineau. They were in the kitchen. "Major Necker."

He took the receiver from her. "Vogel here."

"Good morning," Necker greeted him. "I'm sure it will come as no surprise to you to know that Field Marshal Rommel arrives at the airport in just over half an hour."

Martineau, concealing his astonishment, said, "I see."

"Naturally, you'll wish to greet him. I'll see you at the airport."

Martineau put down the phone slowly as Sarah came in from the garden. "What is it?" she demanded. "You look awful."

"I should," he said. "I think the roof just fell in on me."

At the Silvertide, Muller was hurriedly changing into uniform in the bathroom next to his office. He heard the outside door open, and Kleist called, "Herr Captain? You wanted us?"

"Yes, come in," Muller called as he walked into the office, buttoning his tunic.

"Something up?" Kleist asked. He looked terrible. The bruising around his eyes had deepened and the plaster they had taped across his nose at the hospital didn't improve things.

"You could say that. I've just heard Rommel's flying in on what looks like a snap inspection. I'll have to get up to the airport now. You can drive me, Ernst," he told Greiser.

"What about me?" Kleist asked.

"With a face like that? I don't want you within a mile of Rommel. Take a couple of days off. Let's get moving, Ernst."

After they had gone, Kleist went to the cupboard where the captain kept his drinks, took out a bottle of cognac and poured a large measure into a glass. He swallowed some and went into the bathroom and examined himself in the mirror. He looked awful and his face hurt. It was all that Irishman's fault.

He poured himself another cognac and said softly, "My turn will come, you swine, and when it does . . ." Then he toasted himself in the mirror and emptied his glass.

As the Citroën moved past the harbor, Ernst Greiser said, "By the way, on that inquiry into Vogel. I made that call I had booked to my brother in Stuttgart last night."

"What did he have to say?"

"He didn't. He was on leave. Due back today, on the night shift. I'll speak to him then."

"Not that it matters all that much now," Muller said. "Nothing very mysterious about friend Vogel any longer. He obviously came here in advance of the field marshal." He glanced at his watch. "Put your foot down. We've only got about ten minutes."

Konrad Hofer put his hand on Baum's for a moment in a gesture of reassurance as the pilot, Oberleutnant Sorsa, taxied their plane toward the party of officers waiting nervously on the tarmac. Baum turned to nod briefly at Hofer, then adjusted the brim of his cap and tightened his gloves. Showtime, Heini, he told himself, so let's give a performance.

Sorsa lifted the door. Hofer got out, then turned to help Baum, who had unbuttoned his leather coat to reveal the Blue Max and Knight's Cross at his throat. Felix Necker advanced to meet him and gave him a punctilious salute. "Field Marshal. A great honor."

Baum casually touched the peak of his cap with his field marshal's baton. "You are?"

"Felix Necker, sir. I'm temporarily in command. Colonel Heine has gone to Guernsey for a conference this weekend."

"Yes, I know about that. Now then, who have we here?"

Necker introduced the officers, starting with Martineau. "Standartenführer Vogel, who I think you may know."

"No," Martineau said. "I have never had the pleasure of meeting the field marshal before."

Rommel's surprise at the presence of the SD officer was plain for everyone to see. He passed on, greeting Muller and the other officers and then inspecting the guard of honor. Afterward he walked across the grass to a hangar where Luftwaffe ground crew waited rigidly at attention. Everyone trailed after him.

Finally he turned to Necker. "I want to see everything. You understand? I'll be returning tomorrow, so we'll need a suitable billet for tonight. However, that can wait until later."

"The officers of the Luftwaffe mess have had a light luncheon prepared, Herr Field Marshal. It would be a great honor if you would join them."

"Certainly, Major, but afterward, work. I've a lot to see."

THE officers mess was upstairs in what had been a public restaurant before the war. There was a buffet of salad, roast chicken and ham served by young Luftwaffe boys in white coats. The officers hung eagerly on the field marshal's every word, conscious of their proximity to greatness.

Halfway through the meal Baum excused himself and went off to the washroom, followed by Hofer. He checked himself in the mirror and said, "How am I doing?"

"Superbly." Hofer was exhilarated. "There are times when I really think it's the old man himself talking."

"Excellent." Baum combed his hair and adjusted the cheek pads that made his face squarer. He was more than enjoying himself. One thing was certain. He was good. He thought Rommel, so he became Rommel. That was his talent as a performer. "What about the SS colonel?" he said. "I didn't expect that."

"Vogel?" Hofer was serious for a moment. "I was talking to Necker about him. He just turned up on the island yesterday, backed by a special pass signed by Himmler and the Führer himself. So far he's given no information as to why he's here."

"I don't know," Baum said. "Those guys always make me feel funny. You're certain he has nothing to do with us?"

"How could he? Army Group B headquarters only released the news that you were in Jersey an hour ago. So no need to panic. Let's get back to the fray."

IN THE garden at de Ville Place, Sarah sat on the wall looking out over the bay, and Guido leaned beside her.

The Italian's entrance through the curtains the night before had been dramatic and had shocked them all. But his offer to throw in his lot with them had made sense. Helen and Gallagher had assured Martineau of Orsini's trustworthiness, and so had Sarah, most fervently of all.

Now the Italian spoke to her in English. "Sarah," he said, shaking his head. "Whoever told you that you could pass yourself off as a French tart was gravely mistaken. I knew there was something wrong about you from the start."

"And Harry? Did you suspect anything about him?"

"No. He worries me, that one. He plays Vogel too well."

"I know." She shivered. "I wonder how he's getting on."

"He'll be fine, believe me. You like him, don't you?"

"Yes," she said. "I do." Before they could take the conversation any further, Helen and Gallagher crossed the grass to join them.

"What are you two up to?" Helen demanded.

"We were wondering about Harry," Sarah told her.

"He can take care of himself," Gallagher said. "More important at the moment is the decision on what to do with Kelso. I think we should move him from the chamber to my cottage."

Guido nodded. "That makes sense. Much easier to take him from there down to the harbor. I've made arrangements to meet Robert Savary. After the *Hugo* went down, he was picked up by one of the search-and-rescue craft from St.-Malo, and is due over from Granville this evening. From what you have told me of his part in this business already, he might be willing to smuggle Kelso across to France."

"Do you really think it might work?" Sarah demanded.

"Sean and I can fix Kelso up some fake papers as a French seaman," Guido told her.

"We'll bandage his face. Say he was in the water after the attack on the convoy and sustained burns," Gallagher added.

"When you look at it, we don't really have much choice," Helen said.

Sarah nodded. "I suppose not. But it could all go so wrong."

"Yes, well, we won't think about that," Sean Gallagher said. "We'll move Kelso tonight." He smiled reassuringly and put an arm around Sarah. "It's going to work. Believe me."

MARTINEAU joined the cavalcade of cars as it left the officers mess and took the road through the parish of St. Peter. Rommel fascinated him, as did the idea of being so close to one of the greatest soldiers the war had produced—the commander dedicated to smashing the Allies on the beaches where they landed.

Rommel was certainly energetic. They visited Meadow Bank, in the parish of St. Lawrence, where for two years military engineers and foreign slave workers had labored on tunnels designed to be an artillery depot. Afterward they saw the strongpoints at Plemont and Les Landes. It all took time. The field marshal seemed to want to look in every foxhole, visit every gun post.

By the time they reached St. Aubin, it was evening and most of the party were beginning to flag. Baum, examining the map Necker had provided, noticed the artillery positions on Mont de la Rocque and asked to be taken up there.

Martineau followed, still on the tail of the line of cars, climbing the steep hill of the Mont until they came to a narrow turning that led out on top, where there were a number of flat-roofed houses.

"A gun platoon only," Necker assured Baum as he got out. "No civilians living here now."

The house at the end was called Septembertide. In its garden a narrow entrance gave access to a series of underground bunkers and machine-gun posts, which ran along the crest of the hill under the gardens.

The troops stationed there were overwhelmed to have the Desert Fox in close proximity to them, none more so than the commanding officer, Captain Heider. Septembertide was his personal billet. When the field marshal expressed an interest in it, Heider eagerly led the way into the garden. The views across the bay were breathtaking. The garden was edged with a low concrete wall, and the ground fell almost vertically down to the road far below.

Baum looked up at the house. There was a large terrace in front of the sitting room, and a balcony above running the full length at bedroom level. "Nice." He turned to Heider. "I need somewhere to lay my head tonight. Will you lend it to me?"

Heider was beside himself. "An honor, Herr Field Marshal. I can move in with my second-in-command for the night."

"I'm sure you can find us a decent cook among your men."

"That will be no problem, Field Marshal."

Baum turned to Necker. "This will suit me very well indeed. Impregnable on this side and Captain Heider and his boys guarding the front. What more could one ask for?"

"But first it is hoped that you might join us for dinner at the officers club at Bagatelle," Necker said diffidently.

"Another time. It's been a long day, and frankly, I'd welcome an early night. Call for me in the morning, say at nine, and we can do the other side of the island."

"At your orders, Herr Field Marshal."

They all went around to the front of the house, where there was a general leavetaking. When everyone had gone, Baum asked Hofer, "Did I do well?"

"Superb," Hofer said. "You're a genius, Berger."

THE evening meal had already started at de Ville Place when Martineau got back. He peered in at the window and saw Sarah sitting with Guido and half a dozen other naval officers at the table. He decided not to go in and, instead, went around to the back door and let himself into the kitchen. Helen was washing dishes at the sink and Gallagher was drying for her.

"How did things go?" the Irishman demanded.

"Well enough. No problems, if that's what you mean."

Helen poured him a cup of tea, and Gallagher said, "We've been making decisions while you've been away." He told him how they'd decided to move Kelso to the cottage.

When he was finished, Martineau nodded. "Let's make it later, though. Say, around eleven."

He went upstairs and lay on the bed of the room that, for the sake of their cover, he shared with Sarah. He smoked a cigarette and stared at the ceiling. He was strangely restless, thinking of Rommel and the energy of the man. Suddenly it came to him: what a target! It was nonsense, of course. Shoot Rommel and they'd have the island sewn up tight within an hour. Nowhere to go. They'd probably take hostages until the assassin gave himself up. But in spite of all reason, the thought haunted him. He lay there thinking about it, then got up, put on his belt with the holstered PPK and put the Carswell silencer in his pocket.

He went downstairs to the kitchen, and Helen looked up in surprise. "You're going out again?"

"Things to do." He turned to Gallagher. "Tell Sarah I'll be back soon."

The Irishman frowned. "Is something wrong?"

"Not at all," Martineau assured him. "I'll see you later."

MULLER was working late in his office at the Silvertide when there was a knock on the door and Greiser looked in. "Working late tonight, Herr Captain?"

"I'm trying to catch up on some paperwork," Muller said. He stretched and yawned. "Anyway, what are you doing here?"

"I finally reached my brother in Stuttgart. I've been talking to him about Vogel."

Muller was immediately interested. "What did he have to say?"

"Well, he certainly never came across him at Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. But he does point out it is an open secret that the Reichsführer uses mystery men like Vogel and gives them special powers. Nobody is all that sure who they are."

"Which is exactly the point of the whole exercise," Muller observed.

"Anyway, he says people like that operate out of the SD unit at the Reich Chancellery. As it happens, he knows someone on the staff there rather well. An SS auxiliary named Lotte Neumann."

"And he's going to speak to her?"

"He has a call booked through to Berlin in the morning. He'll get back to me as soon as he can. At least it will tell us just how important Vogel is."

"Excellent." Muller nodded. "Have you seen Kleist tonight?"

"Yes," Greiser admitted reluctantly. "He insisted on going to a bar in some back street in St. Helier."

"He's drinking?"

Greiser hesitated. "Yes, Herr Captain, heavily. I stayed with him for a while, but then he grew morose and angry, as he does. He told me to clear off."

Muller sighed. "Well, you'd better get off to bed. I'll need you in the morning. Nine o'clock at Septembertide."

KLEIST was at the moment parking his Renault at the edge of the de Ville estate, close to Gallagher's cottage. He was dangerously drunk, and he had half a bottle of schnapps with him. He took a pull at it, got out of the car and walked unsteadily along the track toward the cottage.

There was a chink of light at the drawn curtains covering one of the sitting-room windows. He kicked the front door vigorously. There was no response. He kicked again, then tried the handle and the door opened. He peered into the sitting room. There was an oil lamp on the table, the embers of a fire in the hearth, but no other sign of life. He stood at the bottom of the stairs. "Gallagher, where are you?"

There was no reply. He got the oil lamp and went upstairs to see for himself, but both bedrooms were empty. He descended the stairs again, went into the sitting room and put the lamp on the table. He turned it down, leaving the room in darkness except for a dull glow from the embers of the fire.

He took a Mauser from his right-hand pocket and sat down in a chair, nursing the gun in his lap as he waited for the Irishman.

At Septembertide, Baum and Hofer had enjoyed a surprisingly good meal, washed down with a bottle of excellent Sancerre. The half-moon gave a wonderful view of St. Aubin's Bay, and they went out on the terrace to finish their wine.

After a while the corporal who had cooked the meal appeared. "All is in order, Herr Major," he told Hofer. "I've left coffee and milk on the side. Will there be anything else?"

"Not tonight," Hofer told him. "We'll have breakfast at eight sharp in the morning."

The corporal clicked his heels and withdrew.

"My dear Berger, what a day," Hofer said. "The most remarkable of my life."

"And the second act still to come." Baum yawned. "Speaking of tomorrow, I could do with some sleep."

"If you're not already up, I'll wake you at seven," Hofer said.

Baum went inside and climbed the stairs. He closed the outer door to his bedroom suite and walked through the dressing area into the bedroom itself. It was plainly furnished, with heavy velvet curtains at the windows. When he parted them, he found a glass door. He opened it and stepped out onto the balcony.

The view was even better at this height. The sea was calm, a white line of surf down there on the beach, the sky luminous with stars in the moonlight. A night to thank God for.

He raised his glass. "*L'chayim*," he said softly. Then he turned and went back inside, leaving the door open.

It had taken Martineau twenty minutes to make his way up through the trees. The going was rough. He still had no idea what he intended as he pulled himself up over a concrete-block wall cautiously, aware of voices. He stood in the shadow of a palm tree and saw Hofer and Rommel on the terrace in the moonlight.

"My dear Berger, what a day. The most remarkable of my life."

"And the second act still to come."

Martineau stayed in the shadow of the palm tree, astonished at this amazing exchange. It didn't make sense. After they had gone inside, he advanced cautiously across the lawn, then paused as moments later the field marshal appeared on the balcony and stood alone looking out over the bay.

He raised his glass. *"L'chayim,"* he said softly, turned and went back inside. *L'chayim* meant "to life," the most ancient Hebrew toast. It was enough. Martineau reached for the railings on the terrace and pulled himself over.

HEINI Baum took the Blue Max and the Knight's Cross from around his neck and laid them on the dressing table. He removed his cheek pads and examined his face in the mirror.

"Not bad, Heini. Not bad. I wonder what the great man would say if he knew he was being taken off by a Jew boy."

As Baum started to unbutton his tunic, Martineau, who had been standing on the other side of the curtain screwing the silencer onto the barrel of his Walther, stepped inside. Baum saw him instantly in the mirror and reached for his Mauser pistol, which lay on the dressing table.

"I wouldn't," Martineau told him. "They've done wonders with this new silencer. Now, hands on head."

"Is this some plot of the SS to get rid of me?" Baum asked, playing his role to the hilt. "I'm aware that Reichsführer Himmler never liked me, but I didn't realize how much."

Martineau sat on the edge of the bed, took out a packet of cigarettes and shook one out. As he lit it he said, "I heard you and Hofer talking on the terrace. He called you Berger."

"You've been busy."

"And I was outside just now when you were talking to yourself, so let's get down to facts. Number one, you aren't Rommel."

"If you say so."

"All right," Martineau said. "Let's try again. If I am part of an SS plot to kill you on Himmler's orders, there wouldn't be much point if you aren't really Rommel. Of course, if you are . . ."

He raised the PPK, and Baum took a deep breath. "Very clever."

"So you aren't Rommel?"

"I should have thought that was obvious by now."

"What are you, an actor?"

"Turned soldier, turned actor again."

"Incredible," Martineau said. "You fooled me. I saw Rommel in Paris last year and you're exactly like him. Does he know you're Jewish?"

"No." Baum frowned. "Listen, what kind of SS man are you, anyway?"

"I'm not." Martineau laid the PPK down on the bed beside him. "I'm a colonel in the British army."

"I don't believe you," Baum said in astonishment.

"A pity you don't speak English. I could prove it."

"But I do." Baum broke into very good English indeed. "I played the Moss Empire circuit in London, Leeds and Manchester before the war."

"And you went back to Germany? You must have been crazy."

"My parents." Baum shrugged. "Like most of the old folk, they didn't believe it would happen. I hid in the army using the identity of a man killed in an air raid. My real name is Heini Baum."

"Harry Martineau."

Baum hesitated, then shook hands.

"What's the purpose of this masquerade?" Martineau asked.

"Rommel's having a quiet get-together in Normandy with Generals von Stülpnagel and Falkenhausen. A highly illegal business, it seems. Apparently they want to get rid of Hitler and salvage something from the mess while there's still a chance."

"Possible," Martineau said. "There have been attempts on Hitler's life before."

"Okay, so now you know all about me. What about you? What are you doing here?"

Martineau told him briefly about Kelso, omitting any mention of the Operation Overlord connection.

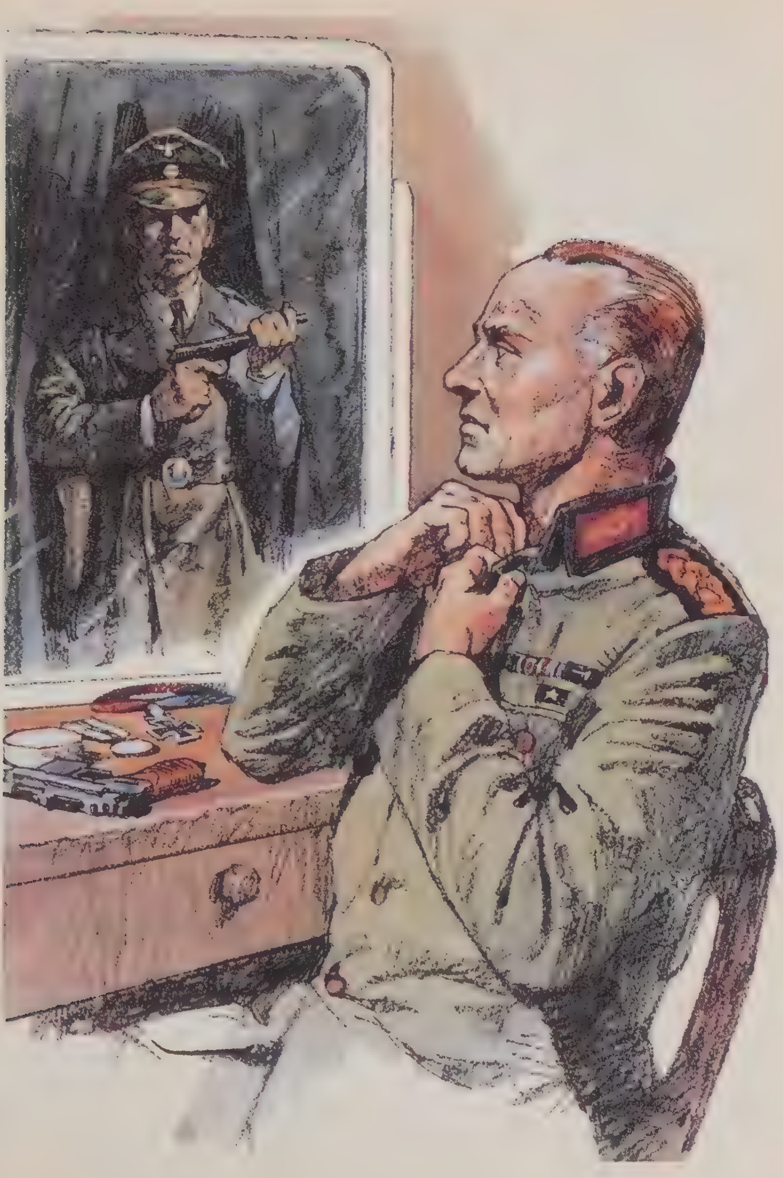
"I wish you luck," Baum said. "From the sound of it, it's going to be tricky trying to get him out by boat. At least I fly out tomorrow night. A nice, fast exit."

Martineau saw it then, the perfect answer to the whole situation. Sheer genius. "Tell me," he said. "Once back, you'll be returned to your regiment?"

"I imagine so."

"Which means you'll have every chance of having your head blown off during the next few months because the invasion's coming and you paratroopers will be in the thick of it. How would you like to go to England instead?"

"You've got to be joking," Baum said, dumbfounded.



"Just think about it." Martineau got up and paced around the room. "What's the most useful thing about being Field Marshal Erwin Rommel?"

"You tell me."

"The fact that everyone does what you tell them to do. For example, tomorrow evening you go to the airport to return to France in the little Storch you came in."

"So what?"

"There's a JU-52 transport up there, the mail plane. I learned about it this morning while waiting for you to land. It's due to leave for France round about the same time. What do you think would happen if Field Marshal Rommel turned up just before takeoff with an SS Standartenführer, a wounded man on a stretcher and a young Frenchwoman, and commandeered the plane? What do you think they'd say?"

Baum smiled. "Not very much, I imagine."

"Once in the air," Martineau said, "the nearest point on the English coast would be no more than half an hour's flying time in that mail plane."

"My God!" Baum said in awe. "You really mean it."

"Do you want to go to England or don't you?" Martineau asked. "Make up your mind." Baum nodded. "That's settled, then." Martineau unscrewed the silencer and put the PPK in its holster.

"What about my aide, Hofer?"

"I'll think of something. I'll join your tour of the east of the island tomorrow morning. At a suitable point, when Necker is there, ask me where I'm staying. I'll tell you about de Ville Place. You tell Necker you like the sound of it. That you'd like to have lunch there. Insist on it. I'll finalize things with you then."

"The third act, rewritten at so late a date we don't get any chance to rehearse," Baum said wryly.

IT WAS just after midnight when Sean Gallagher and Guido took Hugh Kelso down the narrow stairway to Helen's bedroom. The back stairs to the ground floor were wider and easier to negotiate, and after Sarah gave the all-clear signal, they were in the kitchen within minutes. They sat Kelso down, and Helen closed the door to the stairs, turning the key.

"So far so good," Gallagher said. "Are you all right, Colonel?"

The American looked strained, but nodded eagerly. "I'm feeling great just to be moving again."

"Fine. We'll take the path through the woods to my place."

Helen motioned him to silence. "I think I hear a car."

Sarah turned down the lamp, went to the window and drew the curtains as a vehicle entered the yard. "It's Harry," she said.

Helen turned up the lamp again. Sarah unbolted the back door and Martineau slipped in. The excitement was plain to see on the pale face shadowed by the SS cap.

"What is it?" Sarah demanded. "Has something happened?"

"I think you could definitely say that, but it can wait until later. Ready to go, are we?"

"As ready as ever," Kelso said.

"Let's get it done, then."

"Sarah and I will go on ahead to make sure everything's ready for you," Helen said as she turned down the lamp again and opened the door. She and Sarah hurried across the yard. Gallagher and Guido linked hands, and Kelso put his arms around their necks.

Martineau stood to one side to let them go out, closed the door behind him, and they started across the courtyard.

THE pale moonlight filtered through the trees, and the track was clear before them. Sarah took Helen's arm. For a moment there was an intimacy between them, and she was very aware of that warm, safe feeling she had known in the time following her mother's death six years ago. Then, Helen had been not only a strong right arm but the breath of life to her.

"What happens afterward?" Helen asked. "Back to nursing?"

"Not likely," Sarah told her. "Nursing was always only a stopgap. It was medicine I was interested in. But after this, who knows? This whole thing's been like a mad dream. I've never known a man like Harry, never known such excitement."

They paused on the edge of the clearing, the cottage a few yards away bathed in moonlight. "Temporary madness, Sarah, just like the war. Not real life. Neither is Harry Martineau. He's not for you, Sarah. God help him, he's not even for himself."

In Sean Gallagher's cottage, sitting at the window, Kleist had seen them the moment they emerged from the wood, and it was their intimacy that struck him at once. He got up and opened the door a little. It was then that he realized they were speaking English. Helen was saying, "Loving someone is different from being in love. Being in love is a state of heat that passes, believe me. Now, let's get inside. The others will be here in a moment." She put a hand on the door and it moved. "It seems to be open."

And then the door swung, a hand had her by the front of her coat, and the muzzle of Kleist's Mauser pressed against her cheek. "Inside, Frau de Ville," he said roughly, "and let us discuss the curious fact that this little French tart not only speaks excellent English but would appear to be a friend of yours."

For a moment Helen was frozen, aware only of a terrible fear. Kleist reached and grabbed Sarah by the hair.

"You are expecting others, I gather. I wonder who." He walked backward with Helen, pulling Sarah with him. "No stupidities or I pull the trigger." He released Sarah suddenly. "Go draw the curtains and turn up the lamp. Let's have everything as it should be." She did as she was told. "Good. Now come back here."

His fingers tightened in her hair again. The pain was dreadful. She wanted to cry out a warning but was aware of Helen's head back, the Mauser under her chin. Kleist stank of drink, was shaking with excitement as they waited, listening to the voices approaching. Only at the last moment, as the door swung open and Gallagher and Guido backed in, Kelso between them, did he push the women away.

"Look out!" Sarah cried as Martineau slipped in after them, but her anguished cry was too late.

KELSO lay on the floor, and Helen, Sarah and the three men faced the wall, leaning against it in a row, arms outstretched. Kleist relieved Martineau of his PPK and slipped it into his pocket. "The SS must be doing its recruiting in some strange places these days." Martineau said nothing, and Kleist moved on to Guido Orsini, running his hands over him expertly. "I never liked you," he said contemptuously. "All you Italians have ever done is give us trouble."

Kleist turned to Gallagher, running a hand over him quickly. He found nothing and stood back. "Now then, you swine, I've been waiting for this." He smashed his right fist into the base of the Irishman's spine. Gallagher cried out and went down. Kleist booted him in the side, and Helen screamed, "Stop it!"

Kleist smiled at her. "I haven't even started." He stirred Gallagher with his boot. "Get up and put your hands on your head." Gallagher stayed down for a moment, and Kleist prodded him with a toe. "Come on, move it, you thick piece of Irish dung."

Gallagher got to his feet, a half smile on his face. "Half Irish," he said, "and half Jersey, as I told you before."

Kleist struck him backhanded across the face. "I told you to get your hands on your head."

"Anything you say." The gutting knife was ready in Gallagher's left hand, skillfully palmed. His arm swung; there was a click as he pressed the button; the blade flickered in the lamplight, stabbing Kleist up under the chin. Kleist discharged the Mauser once into the wall, then fell back against the table. He tried to get up, but tumbled to the floor and lay still.

"Oh, my God!" Helen said, and turned away.

Martineau crouched down and retrieved his Walther from the dead man's pocket. He looked up at Gallagher. "Where did you learn that trick?"

"A legacy from my old grandfather," Gallagher said.

Martineau and Guido got Kelso onto the couch while Gallagher put his knife away. "Do you think this was an official visit?"

"I shouldn't imagine so." Martineau picked up an empty bottle of schnapps. "He'd been drinking and he wanted revenge. He came here looking for you, and when you weren't here, he waited."

"What happens now?" Kelso demanded. "I mean, if Kleist doesn't turn up for work in the morning, Muller will turn this island inside out."

"No need to panic." Martineau picked up a rug and covered the body. "There's always a way out. First we find his car. It's bound to be parked nearby." He nodded to Guido and Gallagher and led the way out. Within ten minutes they had found the Renault.

"Now what do we do?" Guido asked.

"Give him back to them," Martineau said crisply. "He was drunk and ran off the road in his car. It's as simple as that." He turned to Gallagher. "Have you anyplace suitable to suggest? Not too far, but far enough for there to be no obvious connection with the de Ville estate."

"Yes," Gallagher said. "I think I've got just the place."

"Good. I'll go to the house and get the Kübelwagen. You two take the Renault back to the cottage and put Kleist in the trunk."

He turned and hurried away through the wood.

WHEN Martineau arrived back at the cottage in the Kübelwagen, they already had Kleist's body in the trunk of the Renault, and Gallagher was ready to go. Guido had agreed to remain in the cottage with Kelso, Sarah and Helen.

"How long will it take us to get to this place?" Martineau asked Gallagher.

"About fifteen or twenty minutes at this time in the morning."

"Are we likely to run into anybody?"

"There's the odd military-police patrol, no more than that. We've every chance of driving there without seeing a soul."

"Then let's get moving. I'll follow."

Gallagher was right. Their run along the Route Orange toward Corbière Point passed without incident. Finally Gallagher turned into a narrow lane. He stopped the Renault and got out.

"The road turns along the edge of the cliffs, about two hundred yards from here. It's always been a hazard. No protecting wall."

"All right," Martineau said. "We'll leave the Kübelwagen here." He got a can of petrol and stood on the running board of the Renault as Gallagher drove along the bumpy road between high hedges. They came out on the edge of the cliffs, where a narrow track on the left ran down to rocks and surf below.

"This will do," Martineau called, and hammered on the roof.

Gallagher braked, got out and went around to the trunk, leaving the engine running. He and Martineau dragged Kleist out, carried him to the front and put him behind the wheel.

"All right?" Gallagher demanded in a low voice.

"In a minute." Martineau opened the can and poured petrol over the front seat and the dead man's clothes. "Okay, let him go."

Gallagher released the hand brake, leaving the engine in neutral, and turned the wheel. He started to push, and the Renault left the track, moving across the grass.

"Watch yourself!" Martineau called as he struck a match and dropped it through the open passenger window.

For a moment he thought it had gone out, and then, as the Renault bumped over the edge, orange-and-yellow flame blossomed. They turned and ran back along the lane, and behind them there was a grinding crash and then a brief explosion.

When they reached the Kübelwagen, Martineau said, "You get down in the back, just in case."

Their luck was too good to last, of course, and five minutes later, as Martineau turned onto the Route du Sud, he saw two military-police motorcycles parked at the side of the road. One of the policemen stepped out, hand raised. Martineau slowed at once.

"Military police," he whispered to Gallagher. "Stay low."

He opened the door and got out. "Is there a problem?" At the sight of the uniform the two policemen jumped to attention. One of them held a lighted cigarette in his left hand. "Ah, I see. What we might term a smoke break," Martineau said.

"Standartenführer, what can I say?" the man replied.

"Personally, I always find it best to say nothing. Now, what did you want?"

"Nothing, Standartenführer. It's just that we don't often see a vehicle at this time in the morning in this sector."

"And you were quite properly doing your duty." Martineau produced his papers. "My SD card. Come on, man, hurry up!"

The policeman barely glanced at it, hands shaking as he handed it back. "All is in order."

"Good. You can return to your duties, then." Martineau got back in the car. "As for smoking, be a little more discreet."

He drove away. Gallagher said quietly, "How do you manage to sound like such a convincing Nazi?"

"Practice, Sean, that's what it takes. Lots of practice."

WHEN they got back to the cottage, Sarah opened the door instantly. "Everything all right?"

"Perfect," Gallagher told her as he followed Martineau inside. "We put the car over a cliff and made sure it burned."

"Was that necessary?" Helen shivered.

"We want him to be found," Martineau said. "On the other hand, we don't want him in too good a condition, because then there would be that knife wound to explain."

Kelso said, "So, you had no trouble at all?"

"A patrol stopped us on the way back," Gallagher replied. "I was well out of sight, and Harry did his Nazi bit. No problem."

"So, all that remains now is for Guido to contact Savary in the morning," Sarah said.

"No. There's been a rather significant change of plan."

There was general astonishment. Martineau stood next to the fire and said calmly, "If you'll all sit down, I'll tell you."

Chapter Eight

AT NINE o'clock that same Saturday morning the field marshal's cavalcade left Septembertide and drove to St. Helier. The first stop was Elizabeth Castle. The tide was out. They parked the cars opposite the Grand Hotel and clambered on board an armored personnel carrier, which followed the line of the causeway across the beach. "When the tide is in, the causeway is underwater, Herr Field Marshal," Necker explained.

Baum was in his element, filled with excitement at the turn events had taken. He could see Martineau seated at the other end of the truck, talking to a couple of young officers, and for a wild moment wondered whether he might have dreamed the events of the previous night.

The carrier drove up from the causeway through the old castle gate and stopped. They all got out, and Necker said, "The English fortified this place to keep out the French in Napoleon's time."

"Now we fortify it further to keep out the English," Baum said. "There's irony for you."

As Baum led the way along the road to the moat and the entrance to the inner court, Martineau moved to his shoulder. "As a matter of interest, Herr Field Marshal, Sir Walter Raleigh was governor here in the time of Queen Elizabeth Tudor."

"Really?" Baum said. "An extraordinary man. Soldier, sailor, scientist, poet, historian."

He strode on ahead, Martineau at his shoulder, talking animatedly. Hofer trailed anxiously behind with Necker. An hour later, after a thorough inspection of every gun and strongpoint Baum could find, they were taken back across the beach to the cars.

ON THE cliffs near La Moye Point, a group of field engineers hauled on a line, helping the corporal on the other end to walk up the steep slope. He came over the edge and unhooked himself. The sergeant in charge of the detail gave him a cigarette. "You don't look too good."

"Neither would you. The driver down there is horribly burned."

"Any papers?"

"Gone, along with most of his clothes. The car is a Renault, and I've got the number."

The sergeant wrote it down. "The police can handle it now." He turned to the other men. "All right, back to the post, you lot."

MONT Orgueil, at Gorey, on the east coast of Jersey, is probably one of the most spectacular castles in Europe. Baum stood in the observation post, which had been constructed on the highest point of the castle, and looked across at the French coast through a pair of field glasses. He was for the moment slightly apart from the others. Hofer moved to his shoulder. "Vogel seems to be pressing his attentions," he said softly.

"He wanted to talk, so I let him," Baum replied, keeping the glasses to his eyes. "I'm keeping him happy, Major. I'm trying to keep them all happy. Isn't that what you want?"

"Of course. You're doing fine. Just be careful, that's all."

Necker moved up to join them, and Baum said, "Fantastic, this place. Now I would like to see something different. The other side of island life. Vogel tells me he's billeted at some manor house called de Ville Place. You know it?"

"Yes, Herr Field Marshal. The owner, Mrs. Helen de Ville, is a most charming woman."

"And it's a delightful house, according to Vogel. I think we'll have lunch there. I'm sure Mrs. de Ville won't object, especially if you provide the food and wine." He looked up at the cloudless blue sky. "A beautiful day for a picnic."

Minutes later, as the cavalcade of officers moved out through the main entrance to where the cars waited, a military-police motorcyclist drove up and handed a message to Muller. Martineau, standing nearby, heard everything.

"The bloody fool," Muller said softly, and crumpled the message up in his hand. He went to Necker, spoke briefly to him and then got into a Citroën. It moved away quickly, and Martineau walked over to Necker. "Muller seemed agitated."

"Yes," Necker said. "It would seem that one of his men has been killed in a car accident."

"How unfortunate." Martineau offered him a cigarette. "Allow me to compliment you on the way you've handled things at such short notice."

"We do what we can. It's not every day Herr Field Marshal Rommel comes visiting."

The mess sergeant and his men, who had descended on de Ville Place from the officers club at Bagatelle, brought ample supplies of food and wine. They simply took over, carrying tables and chairs from the house, covering them with white linen tablecloths, working very fast.

Helen searched through the wardrobe and found a summer dress in pale green organdy that dated from happier days. As she was pulling it over her head there was a tap on the door and Sarah came in. "Getting ready to play hostess?"

"I don't have much choice, do I?" Helen told her. She brushed back her hair and pushed in ivory side combs.

Sarah said, "You look very nice."

"And so do you." Sarah was wearing a dark coat and tiny black hat, her hair swept up.

"We do our best. I'll be glad when it's all over."

"Not long now, love." Helen put her arms around Sarah and held her for a moment, then turned and moved to the window. "Yes, I thought so. They're here." She looked around and smiled. "Don't forget that down there among all those officers you and I are formally polite. French only."

"I'll remember."

"Good. Into battle, then."

THE WHOLE AFFAIR WAS OBVIOUSLY a huge success. After lunch Guido Orsini asked permission to take photos, which the field marshal graciously agreed to, posing with the assembled officers, Martineau standing next to him.

Necker, on his fourth glass of champagne, was standing by the drinks table with Hofer and Martineau. "I think Herr Field Marshal is enjoying himself."

Hofer nodded. "Most definitely. A marvelous place and a most charming hostess."

"However reluctant," Martineau commented acidly. "But too well bred to show it. The English upper classes are always the same."

"Perhaps understandably so," Necker said coldly. "Her husband, after all, is a major in the British army."

"And therefore an enemy of the Reich, but then I hardly need remind you of that." Martineau picked up a glass of champagne and walked away.

Sarah was surrounded by the naval officers, and Guido was taking a photo. She waved. "Please, Max," she said in French, "we must have a photo together."

He laughed lightly and put his glass aside. "Why not?"

The others moved to one side, and he and Sarah stood there together in the sunshine. Guido smiled. "That's fine."

"Good." Martineau retrieved his champagne. "And now I must speak to the field marshal. You'll look after Anne-Marie for me, Lieutenant?" he said to Guido, and walked away.

Then he noticed Muller arrive. The policeman looked around, saw Martineau and crossed the grass toward him. "May I have a few words in private, Standartenführer?"

"Of course," Martineau said, and they moved away from the others, toward the trees. "What can I do for you?"

"My man Kleist was killed last night. A messy business. His car went over a cliff at La Moye Point."

"Not good," Martineau said. "Had he been drinking?"

"Perhaps," Muller replied cautiously. "The thing is, we can't think of any convincing reason for him having been there. It's a remote sort of place."

"What has it to do with me?"

"We ran a routine check with the military-police patrols in that sector in case they'd noticed his car. They had not, but we got a report that *you* were stopped on the Route du Sud, at approximately two o'clock this morning."

"Correct," Martineau told him calmly. "But what has that to do with the matter in hand?"

"To get to the area of Kleist's unfortunate accident, it would be necessary to drive along the Route du Sud. I was wondering what you were doing there at that time."

"It's quite simple," Martineau said. "I was about my business, under direct orders of the Reichsführer, as you well know. When I return to Berlin, he will expect a report on what I have found here in Jersey. I'm sorry to say it will not be favorable."

Muller frowned. "Perhaps you'd explain, Standartenführer."

"Security for one thing," Martineau told him. "Or the lack of it. I left de Ville Place at midnight, drove through St. Peter's Valley, up to the village and along to Grève de Lecq. Just after one o'clock I reached St. Ouen's Bay, having taken a back lane around Les Landes. A defense area, am I right?"

"Yes, Standartenführer."

"I then drove along the bay to Corbière lighthouse, and was eventually stopped on the Route du Sud by two military policemen, who were having a smoke at the side of the road. You do get the point, don't you, Muller?" His face was hard and dangerous. "I drove around this island in the early hours of the morning, close to some of our most sensitive installations, and was only stopped once. Would you say that was satisfactory?"

"No, Standartenführer."

"Then I suggest you do something about it." Martineau put his glass down on a nearby table. "And now I think I've kept the field marshal waiting long enough."

As he walked away, Greiser joined Muller. "What happened?"

"Nothing very much. He says he was on a tour of inspection. It fits well enough," Muller said, "but I do hate coincidences. When they get poor old Kleist's body up, see that it goes straight in for a postmortem. If he was awash with schnapps when he died, at least we'll know where we are."

"I'll see to it, Herr Captain." Greiser strode quickly away.

BAUM STOOD TALKING TO HELEN and a couple of officers. He turned as Martineau approached. "Ah, there you are, Vogel. I'm in your debt for suggesting my visit to such a delightful spot."

"A pleasure, Herr Field Marshal."

"Come, we'll talk awhile and you can tell me how things are in Berlin these days." He took Helen's hand and kissed it. "You'll excuse us, Frau de Ville?"

"Of course, Herr Field Marshal."

Martineau and Baum strolled away across the grass.

"Right. This is what happens," said Martineau. "The mail plane leaves at eight. They expect you to fly out in the Storch at about the same time. I'll turn up at Septembertide at seven to collect you. I'll have Sarah with me. Also Kelso, in Kriegsmarine uniform and heavily bandaged."

"What about Hofer?"

"Don't worry about him. I've got a syringe and a strong sedative, courtesy of the doctor who's been treating Kelso. An armful of that and he'll be out for hours. We'll lock him in his bedroom."

"But how do I explain his absence at the airport?"

"I'll come to that in a minute. Necker will be there with his staff to bid you a fond farewell. It's at that point you announce you intend to fly out in the mail plane. Say that the chief medical officer at the hospital has made representations on behalf of this sailor, badly wounded in the convoy attack the other night and in urgent need of special treatment on the mainland. As you're using the bigger plane, you're giving me and Sarah a lift."

"And Hofer?"

"Tell Necker that Hofer is following behind. That he's going to fly out in the Storch on his own."

"And you think all this will work?"

"Yes," Martineau said, "because nobody says no to Erwin Rommel."

Baum sighed. "I'll never get a role as good as this again."

ON A slab in the postmortem room at the hospital, Willi Kleist's corpse looked appalling. Major Speer stood waiting while the two medical corporals who were assisting him carefully cut away the burned clothing. Greiser watched in fascinated horror.

Then Speer ran a scalpel down from just below the throat to the belly, and Greiser could take no more. He removed himself hurriedly to the lavatory.

When he'd recovered, he walked down to the main entrance to phone Muller from the porter's desk.

"It's Greiser, Herr Captain."

"How are things going?" Muller asked.

"Well, it's hardly one of life's great experiences. I'm waiting for Major Speer's conclusions now. They're doing lab tests."

"You might as well hang on for the results. By the way, there's been an interesting development. Your brother phoned. He's heard from this Neumann woman in Berlin. The one who works in the Reichsführer's office."

"And?"

"She's never heard of Vogel. She's kept her inquiries discreet for the moment. Of course, as your brother points out, these special envoys of Himmler are mystery men to everyone else."

"Yes, but you'd think someone like Lotte Neumann would have at least heard of him. What are you going to do?"

"Think about it. As soon as Speer's ready with those results, give me a ring and I'll come round to see what he has to say."

IT WAS just before five when the cavalcade of cars returned to Septembertide. Baum and Hofer got out, and Necker joined them with one or two officers. Martineau stood at the back of the group and waited. "A memorable day, Major," Baum said. "I'm truly grateful."

"I'm pleased it all has gone so well, Herr Field Marshal."

Necker saluted and got back into his car. As the officers dispersed, Baum and Hofer turned to the front door, and Martineau stepped forward. "Might I have a word, Herr Field Marshal?"

Hofer was immediately wary, but Baum said cheerfully, "Of course, Standartenführer. Come in."

Baum went inside, followed by Hofer and Martineau. They went into the living room, where Baum took off his leather coat and his cap and opened the glass door to the terrace. "A cognac, Standartenführer?"

"That would be very acceptable."

Baum nodded to Hofer, who poured the drinks. "What an extraordinary view," Baum said, looking down at St. Aubin's Bay. He raised his glass. "To soldiers everywhere, who always bear the burden of man's stupidity." He emptied his glass, smiled and said in English, "All right, Harry, let's get on with it."

Hofer suddenly looked bewildered, and Martineau produced the Walther from his trench-coat pocket. "It would be stupid to make me shoot you. Nobody would hear a thing with this silencer." He removed Hofer's gun from its holster. "Sit down."

"Who are you?" Hofer demanded.

"Well, I'm certainly not Standartenführer Max Vogel, any more than Heini here is the Desert Fox."

"Heini?" Hofer looked even more bewildered.

"That's me," Baum said. "Heini Baum. Erich Berger was killed in an air raid on Kiel. I took his papers and joined the paratroops. What better place for a Jew to hide?"

"My God!" Hofer said hoarsely.

"Yes, I thought you'd like that. A Jew impersonating Germany's greatest war hero. A nice touch of irony there."

Hofer turned to Martineau. "And who are you?"

"My name is Martineau. Lieutenant Colonel Harry Martineau. I work for SOE. I'm sure you've heard of us."

"Yes, I have indeed. So what do you intend to do?" he asked.

"Field Marshal Rommel will fly out in the mail plane tonight, not the Storch, which means I can leave with him, along with a couple of friends. Destination England."

"The young lady?" Hofer managed a smile. "I liked her. So she also is not what she seems."

"One more thing," Martineau said. "Thanks to Heini, I know where Rommel has been this weekend and what he's been up to. The assassination of Hitler would suit the Allied cause very well. Therefore, when I get back to England and tell my people about this business, they'll keep very quiet. We wouldn't want to make things too difficult for Field Marshal Rommel, if you follow me."

"And how will the field marshal explain to the Führer what happened here?"

"Simple. There's been more than one plot against Rommel's life already by the French Resistance and Allied agents. To use

Berger to impersonate him on occasion made good sense, and what happened here in Jersey proved it. If he'd come himself, I'd have killed him. The fact that Berger has decided to change sides is regrettable for Rommel, but hardly his fault."

Martineau stood up. "Now, let's have you upstairs."

Hofer did as he was told, and they followed him up to the small bedroom he had been using.

"Do you intend to kill me?" he asked.

"Of course not. I need you to tell all to Rommel, don't I?" Martineau replied. "Just bare your arm and don't make a fuss and you'll be fine." Again Hofer did as he was told. He felt a burning pain in his right arm, and almost instantaneously he was plunged into darkness. Baum emptied the contents of the syringe before pulling it out, while Martineau held the major and then eased him down onto the bed.

They went down to the entrance hall. As he opened the front door, Martineau said, "I'll be back at seven o'clock."

Baum nodded. "I'll see you later, then, Standartenführer."

He turned, walked back into the living room and found the cook corporal awaiting him. "At your orders, Herr Field Marshal."

"Something simple," Baum said. "Scrambled eggs, I think. Just for me. Major Hofer is having a rest before we leave."

A SHORT time later Gallagher and Martineau were easing Kelso into a Kriegsmarine uniform, which Sean had acquired from the troop supply depot in exchange for some black-market goods.

Gallagher cut the right trouser leg so that it would fit over the cast. "How's that?" he asked.

"Not bad." Kelso hesitated, then said awkwardly, "There's a lot of people putting themselves on the line because of me."

"Oh, I see," Martineau said. "You mean you deliberately got yourself blown over the rail of that LST in Lyme Bay?"

"No, of course not."

"Then stop agonizing," Martineau told him, and called to Sarah, "You can come in now."

She entered from the kitchen with two large bandage rolls and surgical tape. She went to work on Kelso's face and head, leaving only one eye and the mouth visible.

"That's really very professional," Gallagher said, grinning.

Martineau glanced at his watch. It was almost six o'clock. "We'll go up to the house now, Sean. You keep an eye on him. I'll be back with the Kübelwagen in an hour."

He and Sarah left, and Gallagher went into the hall and came back with a pair of crutches. "Present for you." He propped them against the table. "See how you get on."

Kelso pushed himself up on one leg, got one crutch under one arm, and then took up the other crutch. He took one hesitant step forward, then moved on with increasing confidence to the other side of the room.

"Brilliant!" Gallagher told him. "Long John Silver himself. Now try again."

"Are you certain?" Muller asked.

"Oh, it's quite definite," Speer said. "Something sharp sheared right up through the roof of the mouth into the brain."

"Is it likely such an injury would be explained by the kind of accident he was in?"

"No," Speer said. "Whatever did this was as razor-sharp as a scalpel. The external flesh of the face and neck is badly burned, so I can't be certain, but if you want my opinion, he was stabbed under the chin. Does that make any kind of sense?"

"Yes," Muller said, "I think it does. Thanks very much." He nodded to Greiser. "Let's go."

As Muller opened the door Speer said, "One more thing."

"What's that?"

"You were quite right. He had been drinking heavily. I'd say, from the tests, about a bottle and a half of spirits."

On the steps outside the main entrance of the hospital Greiser asked, "What do you think, Herr Captain?"

"That another word with Standartenführer Vogel is indicated, Ernst, so let's get moving."

In the kitchen at de Ville Place, Sarah, Helen and Martineau sat around the table. The door opened and Guido came in with a bottle. "Warm champagne," he said. "The best I can do."

"Are you certain the house is empty?" Sarah asked.

"Oh, yes. They're all on tonight's convoy to Granville. Kriegsmarine headquarters hasn't given me a new assignment yet."

He pulled the cork and poured champagne into the four glasses Helen provided. She raised hers. "What shall we drink to?"

"Better days," Sarah said.

"And life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," Guido added. "Not forgetting love."

"You wouldn't." Sarah laughed and turned to Martineau. "And you, Harry, what do you wish?"

"One day at a time is all I can manage." He finished his champagne. "I'll go and get Kelso now. Be ready to leave, Sarah."

He drove off in the Kübelwagen toward the cottage. At the same time, two hundred yards to the right, the Citroën carrying Muller and Greiser turned into the courtyard of de Ville Place.

IN THE bedroom, Sarah put on her hat and coat. She heard a car outside and glanced out the window and saw Muller get out of the Citroën. It was trouble; she knew that instantly. She opened her handbag. The little Belgian automatic was still there. She lifted her skirt and slipped the gun into the top of her right stocking, then smoothed down her coat and left the room.

Muller was in the hall talking to Helen. Greiser stood by the front door, and Guido was standing by the door leading to the kitchen. As Sarah came down the stairs Muller looked up.

"Ah, there you are, mademoiselle," Helen said in French. "Captain Muller was looking for the Standartenführer. Do you know where he is?"

"I've no idea. Is there a problem?"

"Perhaps. You've no idea when he'll be back?"

"None at all," Sarah said.

"Very well. If the Standartenführer isn't available, I'll have to make do with you." Muller turned to Greiser. "Take her out to the car."

"But I protest," Sarah started to say.

Greiser smiled, his fingers hooking painfully into her arm. "Protest all you like, sweetheart. I enjoy it," he said, and he hustled her out through the door.

Muller turned to Helen, who tried to stay calm. "Perhaps you would be good enough to tell Standartenführer Vogel on his return that if he wishes to see Mademoiselle Latour, he must come to my office at the Silvertide Hotel." He turned and walked out.

KELSO was doing quite well with the crutches. He made it to the Kübelwagen under his own steam. "Nice going, me old son," Gallagher said, and helped him into the rear seat.

As Martineau got behind the wheel, Guido emerged from the trees on the run. He leaned against the car, gasping.

"What is it, man?" Gallagher demanded.

"Muller and Greiser turned up. They were looking for you, Harry. They've taken Sarah. Muller says if you want to see her, you'll have to go to the Silvertide. What are we going to do?"

"Get in!" Martineau ordered, and as the Italian and Gallagher scrambled aboard he drove away.

In the courtyard of de Ville Place, Helen waited anxiously on the steps. She hurried down to the Kübelwagen as Martineau braked to a halt and Guido and Gallagher stepped out. "What are we going to do, Harry?" she asked.

"I'll take Kelso up to Septembertide, and we'll collect Baum. If worse comes to worst, Baum and Kelso can fly out together. Baum knows what to do."

"But we can't leave Sarah," Kelso protested.

"I can't," Martineau said, "but you can. You're what brought us here in the first place. The reason for everything."

Helen clutched his arm. "Harry!"

"Don't worry. I'll think of something. Now we must go."

The Kübelwagen moved away across the yard, and the noise of the engine faded. Gallagher turned to Guido. "Get the Morris out, and you and I'll take a run down to the Silvertide Hotel."

"What do you have in mind?" Guido asked.

"I never could stand just sitting around and waiting."

MARTINEAU drove into the courtyard at Septembertide and helped Kelso out of the Kübelwagen. Swinging between his crutches, the American followed Martineau to the front door, which was opened by a corporal. As they went in, Baum appeared from the sitting room.

"Ah, Vogel! And this is the man you told me about?" He turned to the corporal. "I'll call you when I want you."

Baum stood back, and as Kelso moved past him into the sitting room Martineau said quietly, "There's been a change of plan. Muller came looking for me at de Ville Place. I wasn't there, but Sarah was. They've taken her to the Silvertide."

"Don't tell me," Baum said. "You're going to go to the rescue."

"Something like that." Martineau glanced at his watch. It was just after seven. "You and Kelso keep to your schedule. Getting him out of here is what's important." Then he walked quickly out, and the Kübelwagen roared away.

Baum poured cognac into a glass. He drank it slowly. "I might have known that under all that cynicism he was the kind of man who'd go back for the girl." He pulled on his leather trench coat and gloves, adjusted the angle of his cap and picked up his baton.

"What are you going to do?" Kelso demanded.

"Martineau told me that the important thing about being Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was that everyone would do what I told them to do. Now we'll see if he's right. You stay here."

He strode through the courtyard into the road, and the men leaning beside the personnel carrier sprang to attention. "One of you get Captain Heider."

A second later Heider hurried out. "Herr Field Marshal?"

"Get through to the airport. A message for Major Necker. I shall be a little later than I thought. Tell him also that I shall leave for France not in my Storch, but in the mail plane. I expect it to be waiting to go when I arrive, and I'd like my personal pilot to fly it."

"Very well, Herr Field Marshal."

"Excellent. I need all your men fully armed and ready to go in five minutes. You'll find a wounded sailor indoors. Have a couple of men help him into the personnel carrier."

"But Herr Field Marshal, I don't understand," Heider said.

"You will, Heider," the field marshal told him. "You will."

SARAH sat on a chair in front of Muller's desk, hands in her lap, knees together. They'd made her take off her coat, and Greiser was searching the lining, while Muller went through her handbag.

"So you are from Paimpol?" he said.

"That's right."

"Sophisticated clothes for a Breton girl from a fishing village."

"Oh, but she's been around, this one, haven't you?" Greiser ran his fingers up and down her neck, making her flesh crawl.

Muller said, "Where did you and Standartenführer Vogel meet?"

"Paris," she said.

"But there is no visa for Paris among your papers."

Her stomach contracted with fear; her throat was dry. "I had one. It ran out." Oh, Lord, Harry, she thought, fly away. Just fly away. And then the door opened and Martineau walked in.

There were tears in her eyes as Greiser stood back and Harry gently put an arm around her.

The emotion she felt was so overwhelming that she committed the greatest blunder of all. "Oh, Harry," she said in English. "Why didn't you go?"

Muller smiled and picked up the Mauser that lay on his desk.

"So, you speak English also, mademoiselle. This whole business becomes even more intriguing. I think you'd better relieve the Standartenführer of his Walther, Ernst."

Greiser did as he was told, and Martineau stepped back, saying in German, "What do you think you're doing, Muller? There's a perfectly good reason why Mademoiselle Latour speaks English. Her mother was English. The facts are there on file at SD headquarters in Paris."

"You have an answer for everything," Muller said. "What if I told you that a postmortem had indicated that Willi Kleist was murdered, the time of death being between midnight and two o'clock? I need hardly remind you that it was two o'clock when you were stopped on the Route du Sud, no more than a mile from where the body was discovered. What do you have to say to that?"

"I can only imagine you've been overworking, Muller. When the Reichsführer hears the full facts, he'll—"

For the first time Muller lost his temper. "Enough of this. It's time we knew the truth about you, Standartenführer. I detest violence. However, Greiser here is different. A strange thing about Greiser. He doesn't like women. He would actually find it pleasurable to extract the truth from Mademoiselle Latour in private, but I doubt that she would."

"Oh, I don't know." Greiser put an arm around Sarah and slipped a hand inside her dress. "I think she might like it."

Sarah's left hand clawed down his face, drawing blood. She felt only rage now, more powerful than she had ever known. As Greiser staggered back, Muller was momentarily distracted. Sarah saw her opportunity. She reached under her skirt and pulled the tiny automatic from her stocking. Her arm swung up and she fired at point-blank range, shooting Muller in the temple. The Mauser dropped from his nerveless hand to the desk; he reeled back and fell to the floor. Greiser tried to get his own gun from his pocket, but it was too late. Martineau had picked up the Mauser.

GALLAGHER and Guido were sitting in the Morris on the other side of the road from the Silvertide when they heard the sound of vehicles. They turned to see a military column approaching. In front was a Kübelwagen with the top down and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel standing in the passenger seat for the whole world to see. The Kübelwagen braked to a halt, Rommel got out, and soldiers ran forward in obedience to Heider's shouted orders.

"Right, follow me!" Baum called, and he marched straight in through the entrance of the Silvertide. He advanced into Muller's office, with Heider and a dozen armed men behind him, and peered over the desk at Muller's body.

"Herr Field Marshal, this woman has murdered Captain Muller," Greiser whimpered.

Baum ignored him and said to Heider, "Put this man in a cell."

"Yes, Herr Field Marshal." Heider nodded, and three of his men grabbed the protesting Greiser. Heider followed them out.

"Back in your vehicles," Baum shouted to the others, and he held Sarah's coat for her. "Let's go."

GALLAGHER and Guido saw them come out of the entrance to the hotel and get into the Kübelwagen, Martineau and Sarah in the back, Baum standing up in front. He waved his arm, and the Kübelwagen led off, the whole column following.

"Now what?" Guido asked.

"Is there no poetry in you at all?" Gallagher demanded."We follow them, of course. I wouldn't miss the last act for anything."

AT SEPTEMBERTIDE, ON THE BED in the small room, Konrad Hofer groaned and moved restlessly. He opened his eyes, mouth dry, and stared at the ceiling, trying to work out where he was. It was like awaking from a bad dream—something you knew had been terrible and yet had already forgotten. Then he remembered. He tried to sit up, and rolled off the bed onto the floor.

He pulled himself up, head swimming, and reached for the door handle. It refused to budge, so he turned and lurched across to the window. He fumbled with the catch and then gave up the struggle and slammed his elbow through the pane.

The sound of breaking glass brought two soldiers running into the courtyard. They stared up.

"Up here!" Hofer called. "Get me out! I'm locked in!"

He sat on the bed, his head in his hands, and tried to breathe deeply, aware of the sound of boots clattering up the stairs and along the corridor. He saw the handle turn. "There's no key, Herr Hofer," one of them called.

"Then break it down, you fool!" he replied.

A moment later the door burst open, and the two men stood staring at him. "Get Captain Heider," Hofer said.

"He's gone, Herr Major."

"Gone?" Hofer still had difficulty thinking clearly.

"With the field marshal, Herr Major. The whole unit went with them. We're the only two here."

The effects of the drug made Hofer feel as if he were underwater. He shook his head vigorously. "Can you drive?"

"Of course, sir. Where does the Herr Major wish to go?"

"The airport," Hofer said. "And there's no time to lose, so help me downstairs and let's get moving."

Chapter Nine

AT THE airport, the Luftwaffe honor guard waited patiently as darkness fell. The JU-52 awaited its illustrious passenger some fifty yards from the terminal building. Necker paced up and down anxiously, wondering what on earth was going on. First of all that unexpected message from Heider about the mail plane, and now this. Twenty minutes past eight and still no sign of Rommel.

There was the sudden roar of engines. He turned in time to witness the extraordinary sight of the armored column coming around the corner of the main airport building, the field marshal standing up in the Kübelwagen, hands braced on the windshield.

The column made straight for the Junkers. Necker saw the field marshal wave to Sorsa, who was looking out the side window of the cockpit. The center engine of the plane coughed into life, and Rommel was barking orders. Soldiers leaped from the trucks, rifles ready, and a bandaged sailor was taken from the personnel carrier to the Junkers by two soldiers.

The whole thing had happened in seconds. As Necker started forward, the field marshal came to meet him. Beyond the field marshal, Necker saw Standartenführer Vogel and the French girl leave the Kübelwagen and go up the short ladder into the plane.

Baum was enjoying himself. He smiled and put a hand on Necker's shoulder. "My deepest apologies for the delay, Necker, but I had things to do. Young Heider was good enough to assist me with his men. A promising officer."

Necker was bewildered. "But, Herr Field Marshal . . ." he shouted above the noise of the engines.

Baum ignored him. "The chief medical officer at the hospital told me of this young sailor, wounded in some convoy attack the other night and badly in need of treatment at the burns unit in Rennes. He asked if I'd take him with me. In the state he's in we'd never have got him into the Storch. That's why I need the mail plane."

"And Standartenführer Vogel?"

"He was going back tomorrow anyway, so I may as well give him and the young woman a lift. We must be off now. Again, my thanks. I shall be in touch with General von Schmettow to express my entire satisfaction with the way things are in Jersey." He saluted and turned to go into the plane.

Necker called, "But Herr Field Marshal, what about Major Hofer?"

"He'll leave later in the Storch, as arranged. The mail-plane pilot can fly him across."

Baum scrambled into the plane, and the crewman pulled up the ladder and closed the door. The Junkers taxied away to the east

end of the runway and turned. There was a deepening roar from its three engines as it moved faster and faster, became only a silhouette in the gathering gloom and then lifted, climbing out over St. Ouen's Bay.

GUIDO had parked the Morris along the airport road. Standing beside it, he and Gallagher saw the Junkers lift into the evening sky.

Guido said softly, "My God, they actually pulled it off."

Gallagher nodded. "So now we can go home and get our stories straight for when the questioning starts."

"No problem," Guido said. "Not if we stick together. I am, after all, an authentic war hero, which always helps."

"That's what I love about you, Guido. Your modesty." Gallagher laughed. "Now, let's get back. Helen will be getting worried."

AT THE airport, Necker was standing talking to Captain Adler, the Luftwaffe duty control officer, when a Kübelwagen carrying Hofer and the two soldiers came around the corner of the main building and braked to a halt.

Necker knew trouble when he saw it. "Hofer? What is it?"

Hofer was being helped out of the vehicle. "Have they gone?"

"Less than five minutes ago. The field marshal took the mail plane. He said you'd follow in the Storch."

"No!" Hofer exclaimed. "Not the field marshal."

Necker's stomach contracted. "What are you saying?"

"The man you thought was Field Marshal Rommel is his double, a traitor called Berger, who's thrown in his lot with the enemy. You'll also be happy to know that Standartenführer Max Vogel is an agent of the British Special Operations Executive."

Necker was totally bewildered. "I don't understand."

"It's really quite simple," Hofer told him. "They're flying to England." He turned to Adler. "Get on the radio. Scramble a night-fighter squadron. There's no time to lose."

THE Junkers was a workhorse and not built for comfort. The interior was crammed with mail sacks, and Kelso sat on the floor propped against them, legs outstretched. Sarah was on a bench on one side of the airplane, Baum and Martineau on the other.

The crewman came out of the cockpit and joined them. "My name is Braun, Herr Field Marshal. Sergeant observer. Oberleutnant Sorsa would take it as an honor if you would come up front."

"It's just the two of you?" Martineau inquired.

"All that's necessary on these mail runs, Standartenführer." He turned to Baum. "If there is anything I can get you . . . ? We have a thermos flask of coffee and . . ."

"Nothing, thank you. Tell Oberleutnant Sorsa I'll be happy to take him up on his offer a little later," Baum said.

"Certainly, Herr Field Marshal." The observer went back into the cockpit.

Baum turned to Martineau and smiled. "Five minutes?"

"That should be about right." Martineau moved across to sit beside Sarah. "Are you all right?"

"You mean am I going through hell because I just killed a man?" Her face was very calm. "My one regret is that it was Muller instead of Greiser. Greiser was an animal. Muller was just a policeman on the wrong side."

"From our point of view."

"No, Harry," she said. "Whichever way you look at it, we're right and the Nazis are wrong. They're wrong for Germany and they're wrong for everyone else. It's as simple as that."

"Good for you," Kelso said.

"I know," Martineau said. "It's wonderful to be young." He tapped Baum on the knee. "Ready?"

"I think so."

Martineau gave his Walther to Sarah. "Action stations. You'll need that to take care of the observer. Here we go."

He opened the cabin door, and he and Baum squeezed into the cockpit behind the pilot and the observer. Oberleutnant Sorsa turned. "Everything to your satisfaction, Field Marshal?"

"I think you could say that," Baum told him.

"If there is anything we can do for you . . . ?"

"There is, actually. You can haul this thing round and fly forty miles due west, until we are completely clear of all Channel Islands traffic."

"But I don't understand."

Baum took the Mauser from his holster and touched it against the back of Sorsa's neck. "Perhaps this will help you."

"Later on, when I tell you to, you'll turn north," Martineau said, "and make for England."

"England?" the observer said in horror.

"Yes," Martineau told him. "Now, change course to the west."

Sorsa did as he was told, and the Junkers plowed on through the darkness. Martineau leaned over the observer. "Right. Now for the radio. Show me the frequency-selection procedure." Braun did as he was told. "Good. Now go and sit down in the cabin and don't do anything stupid. The lady has a gun."

The boy squeezed past him, and Martineau got into the copilot's seat and started to transmit on the frequency reserved by SOE for emergency procedure.

In the control room at Jersey airport, Hofer and Necker waited anxiously while Adler spoke on the radio. After a moment Adler turned to the two officers. "All Luftwaffe night fighters in the Brittany area were scrambled an hour ago. Heavy bombing raids expected over the Ruhr."

"There must be something we can do," Hofer said.

Adler waved him into silence, listening, then put down the mike and turned, smiling. "There is. One JU-88 night fighter. Its port engine needed a check and it wasn't finished in time to leave with the rest of the squadron. Now he's just taken off from Cherbourg."

"But can he catch them?" Necker asked.

"Herr Major," Adler said, "that old crate they're flying in can do a hundred and eighty flat out. The JU-88, with the new engine-boosting system, does better than four hundred."

Necker turned in triumph to Hofer. "They'll have to turn back. Otherwise he'll blow them out of the sky."

But Hofer had been thinking about that. If the mail plane returned, it would mean only one thing. Martineau and the others would be flown to Berlin for interrogation. That couldn't be allowed to happen. Berger knew about Rommel's connection with the generals' plot against the Führer, and so did Martineau. Perhaps he'd even told the girl. Hofer took a deep breath. "No, we can't take a chance on their getting away. Send an order to the pilot of that night fighter to shoot on sight. They mustn't reach England."

"As you say, Herr Major." Adler picked up the microphone.

MARTINEAU left Heini Baum in the cockpit to keep an eye on Sorsa and went back to join the others.

"Everything okay?" Kelso asked him.

"Couldn't be better. I've made contact with our people in England. They're going to provide an RAF escort to take us in." He smiled and took Sarah's hand. She'd never seen him so excited. Suddenly he looked years younger. "You all right?" he asked.

"Fine, Harry. Just fine."

"Dinner at the Ritz tomorrow night," he said.

"By candlelight?"

"Even if I have to take my own." He turned to Braun, the observer. "You said something about coffee, didn't you?"

Braun started to get up, but the plane bucked wildly as a great roaring filled the night. Then the plane dropped like a stone. Braun lost his balance, and Sarah screamed, "Harry! What is it?"

The plane regained stability, and Martineau peered out one of the side windows. A hundred yards away on the port side, flying parallel with them, he saw a Junkers 88.

"We've got trouble," he said. "Luftwaffe night fighter." And he turned and wrenched open the door to the cockpit.

Sorsa glanced over his shoulder, face grim and pale in the cockpit lights. "We've had it. What do I do now?" he demanded. "That thing can blow us out of the sky."

Martineau suddenly saw it all. Something had gone wrong and it had to involve Hofer, and if that was so, the last thing he'd want would be to have them back in Gestapo hands to bring down Erwin Rommel.

At that moment the roaring filled the night again, and the mail plane shuddered as a cannon shell slammed into the fuselage. Sorsa pushed the control column forward, going down in a steep dive into the cloud layer below. The fighter roared overhead, passing like a dark shadow.

Martineau scrambled back into the cabin. Several gaping holes had been punched in the fuselage of the plane, and two windows were shattered. The observer lay on his back, his uniform soaked with blood.

Sarah looked up, surprisingly calm. "He's dead, Harry."

There was nothing to say. Martineau turned back to the cockpit, hanging on as the mail plane continued its steep dive. They rocked again in the turbulence as the JU-88 passed over them.

"You swine!" Sorsa said, in a rage now. "I'll show you."

Baum, who was crouched on the cockpit floor, looked up at Harry with a ghastly smile. "He's a Finn, Sorsa is. They don't really like us Germans very much."

The mail plane burst out of the clouds at three thousand feet and kept on going down.

"What are you doing?" Martineau cried to the pilot.

"Just one trick up my sleeve. He's very fast and I'm very slow, and that makes it difficult for him." Sorsa glanced over his shoulder again and smiled savagely. "Let's see if he's any good."

They were at eight hundred feet when the fighter came in again on their tail too fast, and banking to port to avoid a collision.

Sorsa took the mail plane down to five hundred feet and leveled off. "Right, you s.o.b., let's have you," he said, hands steady as a rock.

And when it happened, it was over in seconds. The night fighter swooped in on their tail again, and Sorsa started to climb. The pilot of the JU-88 banked steeply to avoid what seemed like an inevitable collision, but at that height and speed had nowhere to go but straight down into the waves below.

"You lost, my friend," Sorsa said softly, and eased back the control column. "All right, let's get back upstairs."

Martineau glanced back into the cabin. "You two all right?"

"Fine. Is it over?" Sarah asked.

"You could say that." He turned back to the cockpit as Sorsa leveled out at six thousand feet. He squeezed into the copilot's seat and twisted the radio dial. Everything seemed to be in working order. "I'll let them know what happened," Martineau said, and started to transmit on the SOE emergency frequency.

"My God," Heini Baum moaned. "What a last act!"

Sorsa said cheerfully, "Tell me, is the food good in British prisoner-of-war camps?"

Martineau smiled. "Oh, I think you'll find we make very special arrangements for you, my friend," and then, as he made contact with SOE headquarters, he started to speak into the radio.

In the control room at Jersey airport, Adler sat by the radio, an expression of disbelief on his face. He removed his earphones.

"What is it, for heaven's sake?" Necker demanded.

"That was Cherbourg control. They've lost the JU-88."

"What do you mean, lost it?"

"They had the pilot on the radio. He'd attacked several times. Then they suddenly lost contact and he disappeared from the radar screen. They think he's gone into the drink."

"And the mail plane?" Hofer asked softly.

"Still on radar, moving toward the English coast. No way on earth of stopping her."

There was silence. "What happens now?" Necker asked after a time. "What happens when Berlin hears about this?"

"Lord only knows, my friend," Hofer muttered wearily. "A bleak prospect—for all of us."

About fifteen minutes after Sorsa had changed course for the second time, Baum, still crouched in the cockpit, suddenly pointed to his left. "Look out there."

Martineau turned and saw in the moonlight a Spitfire take station to port. As he checked the starboard side another appeared. He reached for the copilot's headphones.

A crisp voice said in English, "Martineau, do you read me?"

"Martineau here."

"You are now twenty miles east of the Isle of Wight. We're going to turn inland and descend to three thousand feet. I'll lead and my friend will bring up the rear. We'll shepherd you right into Hornley Field."

"Our pleasure." Martineau translated for Sorsa and sat back.

"Everything okay?" Baum asked.

"Fine. They're leading us in. Another fifteen minutes or so, that's all."

Baum was excited. "I can't believe this. I really feel as if I'm breaking out of something."

"I know," Martineau said.

"Do you really? I wonder. I was at Stalingrad, did I tell you that? The greatest disaster in the history of the German army. Three hundred thousand down the drain. I was lucky. The day before the airstrip closed, I was wounded and flown out in a good old JU-52, just like this. Ninety-one thousand taken prisoner, twenty-four generals. Why them and not me?"

"I spent years trying to find answers to questions like that," Martineau told him. "In the end I decided there weren't any answers. No sense and precious little reason."

He listened to the earphones as the voice came over the air again, giving new instructions. He passed them on to Sorsa. They descended steadily. A few minutes later the voice sounded again. "Hornley Field, right in front. In you go."

The runway lights were plain to see, and Sorsa reduced power and dropped his flaps to float in for a perfect landing. The escorting Spitfires peeled away and climbed into the night.

After the Junkers touched down, Sorsa taxied toward the control tower and the plane rolled to a halt.

Baum got up and laughed excitedly. "We made it!"

Martineau joined Sarah, who was smiling. She reached for his hand and held on tight. Kelso was laughing with relief. The feeling of release was fantastic. Baum got the door open, and he and Martineau peered outside.

A voice called over a bullhorn, "Stay where you are." A line of airmen in RAF blue, each carrying a rifle, moved forward.

Baum jumped down onto the runway. The voice called again, "Stay where you are!"

Baum grinned up at Harry, saluting him. "Will you join me, Standartenführer?" And then he turned and strode toward the line of men, the field marshal's baton raised in his right hand. "Put the rifles away, you idiots," he called in English. "We're all friends here."

There was a single shot. He spun around, took a couple of steps back toward the Junkers, then sank to his knees and rolled over.

Harry leaped out of the plane and ran forward, waving his arms. "No more, you fools!" he shouted. "It's me, Martineau."

As he dropped to his knees beside Baum, he was dimly aware of the squadron leader telling his men to stay back. Heini reached up with his hand and grabbed Martineau by the front of his uniform. "You were right, Harry," he said hoarsely. "No sense, no reason to anything. Say *Kaddish* for me. Promise."

"I promise," Martineau said. "Don't talk, Heini. We'll get a doctor."

Sarah crouched beside him. Baum's body seemed to shake, and then his hand lost its grip on Martineau's tunic and he lay still. Martineau got up slowly and saw Dougal Munro and Jack Carter standing nearby.

"An accident, Harry," Munro said. "One of the lads panicked."

"Sometimes I really wonder who the enemy is," said Martineau. "If you're still interested, by the way, you'll find your American colonel in the plane."

He went past them, through the line of airmen, and walked aimlessly toward the old aero club buildings. He sat down on the steps of the clubhouse and lit a cigarette, suddenly cold. After a while he became aware of Sarah sitting a few feet away.

"What did he mean, say *Kaddish* for him?"

"It's a sort of mourning prayer. A Jewish thing. Usually relatives take care of it, but he didn't have any. Now your education's complete. No honor, no glory, only Heini Baum out there, lying on his back," he said.

He got to his feet, and she too stood up. Someone had brought a stretcher, and they were carrying Baum away. Kelso was crossing the runway on his crutches, Munro and Carter on either side of him.

"Did I remember to tell you how well you did?" Martineau asked Sarah.

"No."

"You were good. So good that Dougal will probably try to use you again. Don't let him. Go back to that hospital of yours."

"I don't think one should ever go back to anything." They started to walk toward the waiting cars. "And you?" she asked. "What's going to happen to you?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

She took his arm and held on tight, and as the runway lights were switched off they moved through the darkness together.

JERSEY 1985

Chapter Ten

It was quiet in the library as Sarah Drayton stood at the window peering out. The door opened and the servant came in with a tray, which he placed on a low table by the fire. "Coffee, Contessa."

"Thank you, Vito. I'll see to it."

He went out, and she sat down and reached for the coffeepot. "And what happened afterward?" I asked her.

"Well, Konrad Hofer flew out in the Storch the following morning to brief Rommel on what had happened."

"And how did Rommel cover himself?" I asked.

"Very much as Harry had suggested. He went to see Hitler personally. Told him intelligence sources had warned him of the possibility of plots against his life, which was why he'd used Berger to impersonate him. If he'd gone to Jersey himself, Harry would have assassinated him. Berger was dismissed as a rat who'd deserted the sinking ship."

"I'm sure Rommel didn't put it to the Führer quite that way."

"Probably not. What must have made his story so believable from the Führer's point of view was Harry himself."

"I don't understand."

"Harry had gone to some pains to tell Hofer who he was. The Gestapo had been after him for a long time. Remember, they only just failed to get their hands on him after that business at Lyons."

"So Rommel was believed?"

"Oh, I don't think Himmler was too happy with the story, but the Führer seemed satisfied enough. They drew a veil over the whole thing. Hardly wanted it on the front page of the newspapers. The same thing applied with our people. With D-Day coming, Eisenhower was only too delighted to have got Kelso back in one piece, and our own intelligence didn't want to publicize the Baum affair, because that would have made things difficult for Rommel and the other generals who were plotting against Hitler."

"And they almost succeeded," I said.

"Yes, the bomb plot in July that year. Hitler was injured but survived. Von Stauffenberg and other conspirators were executed."

"And Rommel?"

"Three days before the attempt on Hitler's life, Rommel's car was machine-gunned by low-flying Allied planes. He was badly wounded. Although he was involved in the plot, that kept him out of things in any practical sense."

"But they caught up with him?"

"In time. Someone broke under Gestapo torture and implicated him. But Hitler didn't want the scandal of having Germany's greatest war hero in the dock. He got the chance to take his own life."

"And Hugh Kelso?"

"He wasn't supposed to return to active duty because of that leg of his, but they needed his engineering expertise for the Rhine crossings in March '45. He was killed while supervising work on the damaged bridge at Remagen. A booby trap."

I got up and walked to the window and stared out at the rain, thinking about it all. "Amazing," I said. "And the most extraordinary thing is that it never came out, the whole story."

"There was a reason for that," she said. "After Jersey was liberated on the ninth of May, 1945, it was a difficult time, with accusations and counteraccusations about those who were supposed to have consorted with the enemy. There was a government committee appointed to investigate, and their report was given a special one-hundred-year security classification. You can't read it until the year 2045."

I went back and sat down again. "What happened to Helen de Ville, Gallagher and Guido?"

"They didn't come under any kind of suspicion. Guido was taken prisoner at the end of the war, but Dougal Munro secured his release almost at once. Helen's husband, Ralph, returned in bad shape. He'd been wounded in the desert campaign. He never really recovered, and died three years after the war."

"Did she and Gallagher marry?"

"No. It sounds silly, but I think they'd known each other too long. She died ten years ago. He followed her within a matter of months. He was eighty-three and still a great man."

I'd been putting off the most important question. "And you and Martineau? What happened there?"

"I was awarded the M.B.E., military division. The reason for the award was unspecified, naturally. And Martineau received the Distinguished Service Order. But his health deteriorated. That chest wound from the Lyons affair always troubled him, though he worked at SOE headquarters for a while. There was a lot on after D-Day. We lived together. We had a flat near the office."

"Were you happy together?"

"Oh, yes." She nodded. "But I knew it couldn't last, mind you. He needed more, you see."

"Action?"

"That's right. He needed it like a drug. In January 1945 certain German generals made contact with British intelligence with a view to bringing the war to a speedier end. Dougal Munro concocted a scheme in which an Arado training plane operated by the Enemy Aircraft Flight was flown to Germany by a volunteer pilot, with Harry as passenger. The aircraft had German markings, and they both wore Luftwaffe uniforms."

"And they never got there?"

"Oh, but they did. Landed on the other side of the Rhine, where Harry met the people concerned, and flew back. There was a directive to Fighter Command warning of their return in a German plane. Apparently the message hadn't been forwarded to one particular squadron, and the Arado was attacked by a Spitfire near Margate. Visibility was very bad that day and it was assumed that the Arado had gone down in the sea. Now we know better."

There was silence. She picked a log from the basket and put it on the fire. "And you?" I said. "How did you manage?"

"Well enough. I got a government grant to go to medical school. Once I was qualified, I went to Cromwell Hospital for a year as a house physician. It seemed fitting somehow. For me, that's where it had all started. Guido visited London regularly after the war. Each year I was at medical school he asked me to marry him. I always said no."

"And he'd still come back and try again?"

"In between his other marriages. Three in all. I gave in at last on the strict understanding that I would still work as a doctor. One thing he'd omitted to tell me was just how wealthy the Orsini family was. Their estate was outside Florence. I was a partner in a country practice there for years."

"So you really are a contessa?"

"I'm afraid so. Contessa Sarah Orsini. Guido died in a car crash three years ago. Can you imagine a man still racing Ferraris at sixty-four years of age?"

"From what you've told me of him, I'd say it fits."

"After he died, I decided to come back to Jersey. This island has that kind of effect. It pulls people back, sometimes after many years. As a doctor here, it's easier to use my maiden name. The locals would find the other rather intimidating."

"You and Guido, were you happy?"

"I loved Guido dearly. I gave him a daughter and then a son, the present count, who rings me twice a week from Italy, begging me to return to Florence."

"I see."

She stood up. "Guido understood what he called the ghost in my machine. The fact of Harry that would not go away. As Aunt Helen told me, there was a difference between being in love and loving someone."

"She also told you that Martineau wasn't for you."

"She was right enough there. Whatever had gone wrong in Harry's psyche was more than I could cure." She opened the desk drawer again, took out a yellowing piece of paper and unfolded it. "This is the poem he threw away that first day at the cottage in Dorset. The one I recovered."

"May I see it?"

She passed it across, and I read it quickly.

The station is ominous at midnight.
Hope is a dead letter. Time to change
trains for something better.
No local train now,
long since departed.
No way of getting back
to where you started.

I felt inexpressibly saddened as I handed it back to her. "He called it a rotten poem," she said. "But it says it all."

There didn't seem a great deal to say to that. I glanced at my watch. "I've taken enough of your time. I think I'd better be getting back to my hotel."

"I'll run you down there."

"There's no need for that," I protested. "It isn't far."

"That's all right. I want to take some flowers to the grave."

It was still raining heavily as we drove down the hill and parked outside the entrance to St. Brelade's Church. Sarah Drayton got out and put up her umbrella, and I handed her the flowers.

"I want to show you something," she said. "Over here." She led the way to the older section of the cemetery and finally stopped before a moss-covered granite headstone. "What do you think of that?"

It read, "Here lie the mortal remains of Captain Henry Martineau, late of the Fifth Bengal Infantry, died July 7, 1859."

"I only discovered it last year, quite by chance. I got one of those ancestor-tracing agencies to check up on it for me. Captain Martineau, Harry's grandfather, came here to retire. Apparently he died at the age of forty from the effects of some old wound or other. His wife and children then emigrated to America."

"How extraordinary."

"When we visited this place, Harry told me he had this strange feeling of being at home."

We reached the spot where Harry Martineau had been laid to rest earlier that afternoon, and stood looking down at the fresh mound of earth. Sarah laid the flowers on it and straightened up. What she said then astonished me.

"Damn you, Harry Martineau," she said softly. "You did for yourself, but you did for me as well."

There was no answer to that, could never be, and suddenly I felt like an intruder. I turned and walked away and left her there in the rain in that ancient churchyard, alone with the past.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"For a long time now, people have been urging me to write a book about Jersey," says Jack Higgins, who lives in a luxurious house on that Channel island, off the coast of France. It was excellent advice. The result—*Night of the Fox*—has joined the English author's impressive list of international best sellers, including *The Eagle Has Landed* and *Touch the Devil*, both Condensed Books selections.

Jack Higgins

Jack Higgins (a pseudonym: his real name is Harry Patterson) makes it clear that his suspense thriller is a work of fiction. "I didn't want to write a factual account of Jersey during the occupation years," he says, "because it's a touchy subject here. Some people don't like old stones to be turned over." Instead, the writer took pains to ground his story in real events and then set his imagination to work. "The scene where Colonel Kelso is lost at sea," Higgins explains, "is based on a disaster that was kept secret for years. A ship did go down off Devonshire and there *were* 'Bigots' on board. In fact, all of them got back safely to England, but I was intrigued by the possibility that one of them might have been washed ashore on Jersey."

As part of his research, Higgins drew on the best local sources he could find, including an extraordinary underground war museum that was formerly a German hospital. "I also met a woman who was trapped on Jersey during the war and who used an illegal radio to broadcast news to the islanders. She lent me her diaries."

The novel's philosopher-hero, Harry Martineau, is based on real life too, says the author. "Years ago, at the University of Leeds, I attended some seminars given by a man who had actually been a secret agent. I was fascinated by the idea of an academic being drawn by war into a dangerous and violent situation, as Martineau was.

"As for Rommel," Higgins continues with a smile, "there are many legends about high-ranking Germans visiting Jersey during the occupation. Perhaps the Desert Fox did pay a secret visit. Who knows?"

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by Henry Denker
Morrow, $18.95

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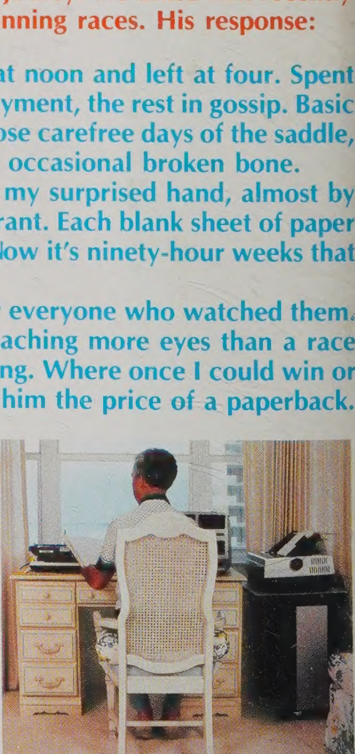
"The Pen Is Mightier than the Saddle!"

That's Dick Francis, above, racing in 1951. Francis, author of this volume's exciting mystery, *Bolt*, was once a champion jockey. We asked him recently how penning best sellers compares with winning races. His response:

"Once I led an easy life—went to work at noon and left at four. Spent about twenty minutes a day in gainful employment, the rest in gossip. Basic routine for a steeplechase jockey. Ah, for those carefree days of the saddle, with nothing to disturb one's peace but an occasional broken bone.

"Thirty years ago a pen was pushed into my surprised hand, almost by accident. That pen persists there today, a tyrant. Each blank sheet of paper is an obstacle longer than any racecourse. Now it's ninety-hour weeks that I know all about. I sweat.

"The races I rode are a faded memory for everyone who watched them. The stories I've written may last longer, reaching more eyes than a race crowd's. But it's a diffuse process, not exciting. Where once I could win or lose a man thousands, now I may just cost him the price of a paperback.

"Yet the pen is mightier than the saddle, for I am certain that no one, bar doting relatives, ever went racing specifically to see me ride. However, it's just possible that someone somewhere will pay to go into a racecourse simply because he's read my books. . . . Read them, perhaps, in Reader's Digest's clever condensations, which seem to spring off the pages. They're fresh, they're fast, they're winners. Not at all unlike my favorite Thoroughbreds!"